

LABOUR MIGRATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS



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Editors : Nagendra Prasad Luitel, Krishna Kumar Aryal, Liana Elizabeth Chase

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Study team :

Research Officer : Nirjala Sharma, Upasana Regmi
Co-team Leader : Dr. Kamal Gautam
Team Leader : Pitambar Koirala
Field Researcher : Jananee Magar, Shree Niwas Khanal,
Nagendra Bhandari, Seema Khadka, Sapana Gautam

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Labour Migration: Psychological and Socio-cultural Impacts

Foreword

During Fiscal Year 1993/94 to 2014/15, over 3.8 million work permits (excluding India) were issued by the Government of Nepal, which represents almost 14% of the present population. According to National Population and Housing Census 2011, nearly 71% of the total absent population, including those living in India, cited private and institutional employment abroad as their primary reason for leaving Nepal. The high number of migrant labourers and the equally higher number of remittances received has piqued a lot of policy-level interest in migration and the economy. However, there is a dearth of reports and studies on the social and psychological effects of migration on families and communities and their relations with each other which encouraged us to conduct this study. While labor migration has contributed significantly to Nepal's economy, evidence suggests it has adverse impacts on individual workers and their families. Migrant workers, returnee migrants and their families are vulnerable to various psychosocial and mental health risks. The primary objective of this research study was to explore the less-discussed facet of migration: the socio-cultural, and psychological impacts of migration faced by migrant workers and their families. It sheds light into various reasons for choosing foreign migration ranging from disadvantaged economic status to attractive advertisements broadcasted by the media. Additionally, it has disaggregated the issues and challenges faced by migrants into three phases: pre-departure, departure and post-departure and finally provides insights into the physical, economic, social, and psychological impact of migration in each of the three phases. We strongly believe that study like this is imperative to formulate evidence-based plans and policies on labor migration and map effective implementation strategies for the same. This research study would not have been possible without the support of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Funded-Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Program implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF). We are also grateful to various stakeholders such as government officials, non-government officials, private agencies community members, the research team and everyone else involved in this study for enabling us to capture critical aspects of migration. We hope this study contributes to deepening our understanding of migration and its effects at the individual and community level.

Suraj Koirala

Executive Manager

TPO Nepal

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-The study team

List of Abbreviations

CTIP	:	Combating Trafficking In Persons
FEPB	:	Foreign Employment Promotion Board
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
GCCs	:	Gulf Co-operation Countries
GDP	:	Gross Development Product
IDI	:	In Depth Interview
ILO	:	International Labor Organization
IOM	:	International Organization for Migration
KII	:	Key Informant Interview
MoLE	:	Ministry of Labor and Employment
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC	:	Nepal Health Research Council
PNCC	:	Pravasi Nepal Co-ordination Committee
SaMi	:	Safer Migration Project
TAF	:	The Asia Foundation
TPO	:	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
TUTH	:	Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital

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Operational Definition

Labour migrants: Nepalese individuals both male and female pursuing foreign employment in gulf countries. This excludes Nepalese migrants opting for India for employment opportunities and those working in India.

Returnee migrant: A Nepalese migrant worker returned after foreign employment in gulf countries.

Illegal migration: Labor migration involving illegal route (Via India or Bangladesh) to reach gulf countries without a work permit.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The ILO Convention on Migration for Employment 1949, (No. 97) in its Article 11, states: “migrant for employment means a person who migrates from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his own account and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant for employment.” The practice of labour migration in Nepal started only during the 19th century when the Gurkha soldiers were recruited in the British Army (Graner, 2010). The trend of labour migration grew eminently during the last 50 years with the oil-bloom of Arab countries beginning in the 1970s. Though the number of male labour migrants is relatively higher than female labour migrants, from 2006/07 to 2013/14, despite prohibition from government, the migration rate for females increased by 74 times whereas for males it increased by less than two and a half times. The channel used by the majority of male migrants to obtain a labour permit is recruiting agencies whereas for females it is usually through an individual (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2014) which puts females into a vulnerable state.

Though the data on remittances is not disaggregated in terms of migrant workers and other sources of remittances, the annual personal remittances contribution (% of GDP) has been increasing since 2011. In 2011 this contribution was 22.37% followed by 24.95%, 28.81%, 29.72% and 31.75% in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015, respectively (World Bank, 2016). This increasing trend in remittances has helped in the reduction of poverty in Nepal from 42% in 1996 to 25.16% in 2012, according to Nepal Living Standard Survey (Adhikary & Gurung, 2012). However, families having remittances appear to migrate to urban areas where they spend, not invest, money for a luxurious lifestyle; thus, remittances have not contributed substantially to the nation’s infrastructure development.

Looking into the migration trend in Nepal over the census periods, of the total population, the 1991 census recorded an absent population of 3.4% (658,290, of which 83.2% were male and 16.8% were female), the 2001 census recorded an absent population of 3.2% (762,181, of which 89.2% were male and 10.8% were female) and the 2011 census recorded an absent population of 7.3% (1,921,494, of which 87.6% were male and 12.4% were female). (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). This trend shows that the number of absentees in Nepal is increasing rapidly and the majority of absentee has been accounted. At present, it has been observed that around 400,000 people a year migrate to gulf countries for work, roughly 1200-1500 each day. Of these, 13% are females. Most are above 24 years of age. More than 75% of the people who migrate are semi-skilled/unskilled with education under SLC level. They opt to migrate to gulf countries to earn money to send to their families (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Department of Foreign Employment, 2016). Most international migrants, particularly in gulf countries, are employed in occupations that fall into the category of the “three Ds:” difficult, dirty, and dangerous (Joshi et al., 2011).

Migration can increase the risk for family breakdown, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress (Kahn et al., 2003). A higher burden of mental health problems is borne by low caste people and women (especially households led by women alone), caused partly by discrimination, deprivation of resources and structural violence (Tol et al., 2010). Additionally, cultural identity, biological and psychological factors are considered

important factors in the development of mental illnesses such as depression, phobias and schizophrenia in migrants (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

According to the Foreign Employment Promotion Board (FEPB) data, from FY 2008/09 to FY 2014/15, a total of 4,322 migrant workers died across 24 destination countries, majority of which 4,235 were males and 87 were females. The death rate for male migrant workers (at 1.62 deaths per 1,000 migrant workers) is higher than that of female migrant workers (at 0.64 deaths per 1,000 migrant workers). The major causes of death among labour migrants were cardiac arrest followed by natural causes and other (such as homemade alcohol consumption, work overload, stress caused by fraud recruitment agencies and maladaptive personal and social behavior in destination countries) or unidentified causes. The data also showed that 10% of all deaths in the period was attributed to suicide. The majority of suicides among male migrants occurred in Malaysia and among females, in Kuwait and Labanon (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2016). For male migrants workers in the Middle East, anxiety and depression are occupational health risks (Adhikary et al., 2011). Suicide was the leading cause of death among female labour migrants. Causes of suicide are linked with extreme stress and/or feelings of hopelessness. Though few studies have been conducted on this subject, there is evidence that Nepali women face workplace violence while abroad (Bhadra, 2013). Female migrants can be physically, sexually and mentally exploited by employers, and suffer from mental disorders such as psychosis, severe depression and schizophrenia (Adhikary et al., 2011).

Owing to these recent trends in labor migration and the associated risks, it had become an utmost priority to study the overall socio-cultural and psychological impact of labour migration on migrant workers and their families. Through this study we have tried to find out the various impacts on migrant worker's lives and the way they are coping with different scenarios. Despite many studies being conducted on labour migration issues, few have explored socio-cultural and psychological aspects. There is a particular dearth of qualitative studies focusing on these aspects in the context of Nepal. Through intensive qualitative study, we sought to interview not just migrant workers and their families, but also various agencies and officials dealing with labour migration. Based on this study, we aimed to make informed recommendations and decisions for mid- to long-term interventions.

1.2 Objectives

The overall objective of this study was to explore the socio-cultural and psychological impact of issues faced by migrant workers and their families in Makwanpur, Dhanusha, Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk districts.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the issues faced by migrant workers
2. To find out the socio-cultural and psychological impacts of such issues on migrant workers and their families.
3. To identify the factors that increase migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation.
4. To identify viable policy options on foreign employment.
5. To conduct mapping of vocational, legal and health services available for migrant workers and their families.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

2.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Makwanpur, Dhanusha, Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk districts of Nepal. These districts were selected on the basis of highest number of migrant workers (Dhanusha) and district having the highest number of female migrant workers (Sindhupalchowk) migrating to the Gulf Co-operation Countries (GCCs) (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2016). In addition, geographical terrain (ecological belt) was considered in selecting Dhanusha and Makwanpur from the Terai, Sindhupalchowk from the mountains, and Kathmandu from the hilly region.

2.2 Study Design

A cross-sectional exploratory study design was used comprising Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) as data collection techniques.

2.3 Study Population

The study population included returnee migrant workers, opting migrant workers to gulf countries, and their family members. In addition, we included agencies and individuals affiliated with the process of labour migration (e.g. manpower agencies, agents and medical practitioners), representatives from government agencies (Ministry of Employment & Labour; Foreign Employment Division; Foreign Employment Promotion Board; District Police Office; and Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare) as well as those from non-government agencies (NGOs/INGOs).

2.4 Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was applied, in which we sought a homogeneous population sharing particular characteristics based on the interests of the study. This was followed by snowball sampling. Potential participants were identified with the help of local organizations in study areas working on different aspects of labour migration. KIIs were conducted with stakeholders and representatives from governmental as well as non-governmental agencies. Similarly, FGDs and IDIs were conducted among returnee migrants and their family members, who were identified with the help of organizations they were affiliated with or service providers they were in touch with.

2.5 Data Collection Tools/Guidelines

KIIs, FGDs, and IDIs were used and guidelines for each were developed by the study team based on the research objectives. The guidelines included open-ended questions which were finalized after conducting pretest in Kathmandu.

Researchers for data collection were selected and provided with a 2-week training, orienting them on the study design, objectives, tools and all essential background information. The data collection began from the first week of March 2017 in Kathmandu. The trained researchers first visited the respective study areas and identified the potential participants

who could provide information about that community. Written informed consent from all participants was obtained prior to the interview or discussion. The participants were fully informed about the objectives and the nature of the study. Only those who voluntarily agreed to participate were included. Data collection was conducted in local language.

The KIIs were conducted to identify the push and pull factors of labour migration, migrant worker's situation and their perceptions of the psychological and socio-cultural well-being of migrant workers. Key informants were interviewed using the KII guidelines with additional probing questions when relevant. Similarly, IDIs were done to identify the issues related to labour migration in the context of Nepal. They were carried out among the returnee migrant workers and their family members. Also, FGDs were conducted among the returnees and their families to understand the socio-cultural and psychological impact of migration as well as their general perceptions on labour migration. FGDs were conducted with male and female groups separately.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

A total of nine FGDs, four male groups and five female groups, were conducted (one male group and one female group each in Kathmandu, Makwanpur and Dhanusha districts; two female groups and one male group in Sindhupalchowk). Each FGD consisted of one facilitator, one note taker, and around 6-12 participants. In total, the FGDs had 83 participants. The FGDs were around one hour long. For the FGDs, we included returnee migrant workers, those who had already received a visa in anticipation of working in GCCs, and family members of both groups.

Key Informant Interview (KII)

We conducted 19 KIIs (four each in Makwanpur and Sindhupalchowk, five in Dhanusha and six in Kathmandu). One-on-one interviews were conducted in private locations following an informed consent procedure. Interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The interviewees included community leaders, representatives from manpower agencies and agents, NGO workers, government officers, policy level experts/officers, psychiatrists, and police officers.

In-depth Interviews (IDIs)

A total of 18 IDIs were carried out -12 with returnee migrant workers (four in Kathmandu, three each in Makwanpur and Dhanusha and two in Sindhupalchowk) and 6 supportive interviews with their family members. These interviews explored the overall issues faced and their socio-cultural and psychological impacts.

2.6 Data Management and Analysis

All the audio-recorded data from KIIs, FGDs and IDIs were transcribed verbatim and later translated into English. A thematic analysis approach was used for data analysis of transcripts and field notes. For this, the major themes were developed based on an initial reading of approximately 21% of data. NVivo (version 11) was used in the process of data management and analysis, wherein the translated data were imported and nodes were

created using the generated themes; sub-nodes were agreed upon by the research team familiar with the data. The researchers compared coding until they reached an acceptable degree of inter-coder agreement.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC). Participants were informed thoroughly on the study purposes before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all the study participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained and the findings do not report any personal identifiers.

2.8 Limitations of the Study

The study covered limited areas of four districts. Although it provides a glimpse of labour migration issues in Nepal, the findings might not represent the scenario of the whole country since it does not cover internal migration and individuals migrating to India and countries apart from GCCs.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

3.1 Reasons behind choosing labour migration

This section includes push and pull factors linked with labour migration to GCCs. The major factors included poor economic status, lack of employment opportunities, exploitations and gender based violence, social pressure, imitation and sense of competitions, political instability and natural disasters, influences of advertisement and social media.

3.1.1 Poor economic status

Majority of participants reported that labour migration was a necessity and not their will or desire. Factors such as poverty or poor economic status were named as the principal reason for a rise in migration of Nepali youths to GCCs. Many people were reported of not being able to fulfill basic needs of their families and children and therefore chose to fly abroad in search of better job opportunities with higher pay scales. Youths opted to work abroad when they had family debts on their shoulders. Some participants reported having a chronically ill family member, but were not capable of providing proper treatment due to poor economic status. Those people took loans and went abroad in order to tackle such problems.

3.1.2 Lack of employment opportunities

According to participants, one of the major reasons that a huge segment of the youth population being drawn into foreign employment was lack of proper job opportunities in Nepal. They reported that even educated and qualified people had no career opportunities in the country and therefore unskilled and semiskilled people would not find employment in this situation. On the other hand, if they could invest a few thousand dollars they could migrate abroad for work and earn their living, which was not possible in their homeland. Participants further mentioned that bribes and nepotism in employment sectors had demotivated Nepali youths to stay and work in their country. And hence, many felt that the only option left was foreign employment.

Contrastingly, some participants reported that holding jobs in Nepal would not curb migration either as the major reason for choosing to work abroad was inadequate pay scale back here in Nepal. Labour works in Nepal were reported to neither be socially valued nor sufficiently paid.

"I used to work in Gorkhali Cigarette Factory here in Hetauda. Seven years of working made me realize that my family cannot do economic progress by the help of this job. So, I left the job and headed to foreign land."-FGD Participant, Male, Makwanpur

3.1.3 Exploitation and Gender-based violence

Trafficking of women, sexual abuse and exploitation were reported to be push factors for the sufferers. Many women were found to have opted for labour migration due to humiliation and mockery resulting from their past history of incidences. According

to a key informant from a local organization in Makwanpur, some women chose labour migration to escape domestic violence and other family problems. Many women who had been rehabilitated from brothels and those who had experienced sexual violence tend to move abroad as reintegration in community was difficult for them. House wives chose to leave for labour migration abroad when their husbands stopped helping them financially on family affairs, the root cause being linked to economic hardships again. When the bread-winners of the family, generally males in Nepali culture, struggled with alcoholism and addiction, they could not ensure an optimum quality of life for their kids; this compelled their female counterparts to choose labour migration for the sake of their children's welfare and optimum life standard. Some female participants reported that second marriage by their husbands, apart from alcoholism and addictions, had a direct impact on their state of mind, leaving them helpless. With a view to leading an independent life and for the better future of their children, some chose labour migration and went abroad. Unlike males opting for labour migration, females reported having been warned by their community members that they might have to be engaged in illicit relationships with their boss or the employers in order to please them.

3.1.4 Social pressure, Imitation and Sense of Competition

Participants from all the districts reported that influence and imitation were causes of labour migration. Some people moved abroad after being influenced and lured by their friends and relatives. The participants reported that when they saw their friends returning from abroad with loads of money and fancy materials, they too made up their minds to fly abroad, work there and come back home with a handsome amount of money. Similarly, another factor that made youths opt for labour migration was found to be social pressure from family, relatives and neighbors. Some of the KII participants reported that when children had drug addictions or were on the wrong track, parents forced them to go abroad and work thinking it could help them get out of such anti-social activities. A participant from Dhanusha reported that foreign employment had become a trend of imitation, temptation and excitement. People were found to have migrated for foreign employment to GCCs despite having a sound economic status.

"When I went to Urnapun VDC, students who passed grade 8 had passports, they would or would not pass SLC, they would study up to 10th and go abroad. They say that they have social and family pressure. He went, the other guy went so when are you going? When will you earn money?" –KII, Female, Kathmandu

3.1.5 Political instability and natural disasters

The participants also expressed that political turmoil in the country, strikes and *Bandh* have contributed to the increase in labour migration. The 10-year long people's war and recent mega earthquake in the country were reported to be significant causes of labour migration, particularly by the participants from Sindhupalchowk. They mentioned that their district was highly affected by the insurgency, which led to unemployment among people. They were then forced to opt for foreign employment. Sindhupalchowk is also among the hardest-hit districts by the April 2015 Nepal earthquake.

3.1.6 Influences of Advertisements and Social Media

It was found that advertisements and social media were also influential pull factors for labour migration to GCCs. Social influences included flaunting of social status by the returnee migrant workers to the community and exaggerated depiction in social media of their personal experiences abroad. Men and women were found to have assumed that foreign employment was their last resort, and the only thing that could fulfill all their needs. People tended to be fascinated by the attractive features of working abroad such as the facilities and salaries advertised by the manpower agencies. The anticipation of better life styles, improved financial status and a better future of their children have been drawing many to labour migration. Globalization and sharing of their joyful experiences in social networking sites was also reported to have been highly influential. Similarly, many youths were found to have been driven by the wish to merely visit new places. Some reported having watched jet planes on television and being attracted to the idea of flying abroad.

“They uploaded their weekend whereabouts to beautiful places but never shared their work condition where they had to stay in deserts for months with very little water and food.”- FGD Participant, Male, Sindhupalchowk

3.2 Issues faced by Migrant Workers and their Families

Here we have tried to discuss various issues faced by the labour migrants during the time of departure to GCCs for foreign employment. We have tried to explore the challenges and issues that arise throughout the process of migration: prior departure, during departure and post-departure.

3.2.1 Blind trust on local agents and relatives

The opting migrants were found to have trusted agents, also called brokers or mediators, instead of a manpower agency or consultancy providing services related to labour migration. The participants reported that they generally came across local agents as their first point of contact to get first-hand information on labour migration. Next were people in the neighborhood or relatives who had returned from gulf countries as labour workers, from whom they also sought information. Many reported having trusted the agents who happened to be local people from their community, their relatives, neighbors or friends, whom they would give money for all pre-departure procedures. These being their own kith and kin, opting migrants reported not having taken any documentary evidence of monetary transactions. This made them vulnerable to exploitation and many were found to have been cheated. In addition to monetary transactions, the agents were also found to have collected certificates and personal documents including passports from the opting migrants. These documents were not provided until they boarded the plane. They further added that they were not provided visas on time, and at times had to wait for some 6 to 7 months. Though some agents were working for particular agencies, many were just brokers and working illegally. Furthermore, such agents were said to have charged more money as per their will whenever they wished.

“It is also very difficult to recover your money that is paid to agent without any proofs and documents. When you complain about your condition in which you are waiting to go abroad with concerned people, they want you to show proofs that you have given your money to them. As you fail to show proofs your money cannot be recovered.”- FGD Participant, Male, Sindhupalchowk

3.2.2 Lack of co-ordination between mediators, man power agencies and opting migrants

The participants asserted that some agents served as a liaison between manpower agencies and the opting migrants and there was no direct dealing with such agencies by the opting migrants. It was also reported that in some cases the work permit of one person had been illegally transferred to another. Females were mainly found to have opted for domestic work abroad. They were found to have chosen alternative pathways such as travelling via Delhi, India, with some being sexually abused by agents and going missing thereafter. Representatives of manpower agencies, in contrast, mentioned that the migrant workers themselves were not accessing services from the registered manpower companies and rather preferred local agents and mediators and hence were suffering from their own choices. One of the representatives from a manpower company mentioned that some 15,000 people filled in the forms for an employment opportunity in a company that demanded 15 workers, suggesting fraudulences.

“I went to Kuwait three times. I went via Delhi the first time and then next time onwards I went with work permit. When I went via Delhi, the agent took money from me around NRs. 50,000. And also my first two month’s salary was sent to him. Since then I realized that these mediators are there just to draw money from us and therefore I didn’t go through these agents when I went next two times. I went with work permit.” –FGD Participant, Female, Kathmandu.

3.2.3 Illiteracy and negligence

Many migrant workers were found to be illiterate. Their illiteracy was reported to have contributed a lot to their suffering. The participants reported that they had to face problems at each and every step throughout the process of migration. Sadly, even some of the educated migrants were reported to have been negligent; they had instead overlooked their documents thereby falling prey to fraudulence. It was found that the opting migrants, irrespective of their educational status, were vulnerable. They had a mindset of going abroad as soon as possible and failed to take necessary precautions.

“I didn’t look at the contract. I just signed it without reading it. I thought there would be no risk as my brother (relative) would never cheat me. I later came to know that they deceived me with 50,000.” –FGD Participant, Male, Dhanusha

Those who were illiterate were found to have fear of missing their flights and confusion on entry and exit points. Moreover, illiteracy was found to be a reason behind relying upon agents for entire process, as the opting migrants would thus

not need to put in much effort and would not have to visit Kathmandu several times prior departure. As a result, many didn't have any idea about what document they had with them and faced challenges in immigration at the airport.

There were reports that agents handed over fake documents to the labour migrants during their departure. The opting migrants reportedly were asked to show the fake document to the immigration staff in Nepal and after boarding, they were asked to tear the document up and the agent handed over another document that was to be shown in the destination country. Because they could not read the document, they did not know which one was the real contract paper.

3.2.4 Orientation Class for Migrant Workers

There is a provision from the Government of Nepal for a pre-departure orientation class for migrant workers, but many were found to have gone abroad without taking such class. This reportedly made workers vulnerable to many problems. Orientation classes are very useful as they give information about how to deal with agents and how to take care of oneself while abroad. However, many people skipped the classes and went abroad without any preparation or without any training.

"They skip going to Kathmandu for a couple of days for orientation class as they are certain about their departure. Some of them are overconfident but regret not taking classes when they toil hard in foreign land."- KII, NGO Worker, Makwanpur

3.2.5 Lack of proper guidelines and orientation on proper/safe methods of departure

The participants from KII, IDIs and FGDs reported both legal and illegal methods that migrant workers adopt while departing for labour migration. The majority of the participants described having experienced problems because they chose illegal ways of going abroad such as through brokers or agents and often used the Indian route— crossing the open border during the night to fly from India. They shared that they did not have any legal documents with them when they adopted illegal pathways for labour migration. They did not have a work permit from the foreign employment promotion board nor was their departure recorded anywhere. They further reported that the agents preferred illegal routes via Bangladesh or Delhi where the opting migrants were stuck for several days and sometimes months in a state of confusion and distress. Many participants also mentioned that when they faced these situations their first time going abroad, the next time they adopted legal methods to avoid such challenges. They mentioned that they were aware that they would be cheated and misled if they followed illegal pathways.

It was reportedly noteworthy that not only manpower agencies, agents, mediators or brokers but the migrant workers themselves might have also been responsible for fraudulences. Some people were found to opt for the most convenient way to migrate so that they didn't have to arrange for documents and every step was arranged by the agent involved.

Participants from manpower agencies or companies reported having followed a legal and step-by-step process in sending Nepali youths to the foreign lands. However, it has also been reported that workers had suffered even when migrating through the manpower companies. A key informant who worked as a government officer mentioned that lack of orientation trainings and lack of proper information from manpower companies have led migrants to being vulnerable and suffering from several problems.

3.2.6 Stranded while in Airport

Since it was the first time going abroad for many of the labour migrants, they reported that they were stressed during their travel to foreign countries. They recalled being anxious while in transit over whether they would reach their destination or get lost along the way. Confusion over how to deal with people and procedures at the airport were reported to be a challenge for the migrant workers.

Some participants also reported that they were asked to tell a lie at airport about the money they had spent during the entire process of labour migration. They were warned to keep things secret and threatened with imprisonment. They were obliged to do as told because they didn't want to face any hindrances at the last moment. It was also mentioned in a FGD that though they had paid lakhs of money to the manpower agencies, they were provided with receipt for payment of only Rs.10,000.

3.2.7 Language Barrier

Language barriers were reported to affect the migrant workers from the time of boarding the plane. Some of the participants shared that they did not eat anything during their flight as they thought the food that was being offered would cost money.

"We faced difficulties in the plane. We didn't know how to fasten the seat belt, when air hostess asked about our food preferences we had no idea what she was talking about. In the immigration at the destination, Arabic people didn't speak much English and it was difficult to understand what they said. Some of us didn't understand which one was entry and which one was the exit door." –**FGD Participant, Male, Sidhupalchowk**

They further stressed that they constantly feared missing important information or instruction being shared at the airport as they didn't understand the language being spoken.

3.2.8 Economic issues

As expressed by the participants, once the migrant workers reached their destination country, many had a very nice mental picture of the job they were heading for. They mentioned their expectations of the nature of job, an attractive salary, and so forth. But they explained how they were shattered to find a completely different scenario as soon as they reached the foreign country.

The individuals were reportedly attracted towards labour migration as they were assured of being provided with an attractive salary, and they took loans with the hope that the loan could be later on easily paid off. Most of the responses on this topic were about false assurances by the man power agencies and receiving a lower pay scale than they were promised prior to departure.

"I didn't get the exact job, I had applied for. They had given me two job contracts before flying. First paper contained the exact work position that I applied for and the second contract was of labourer. The agent tore the first contract letter after departure and asked us to show the second one at the destination country. When I told my boss about it, he brought the contract and read it to me. I then realized that I was cheated."—**IDI, Male, Dhanusha**

A few responses were about employers not abiding by their own government's rules and regulations. They stressed that even though the government announced increment in salary of the workers, the employers did not bring this into practice. A few participants mentioned that trying to negotiate about the salary they were promised, did not help. The employers replied that they had an agreement with the agencies that brought the migrants. One participant sadly mentioned that he felt he was sold like an animal.

3.2.9 Socio-cultural Issues

Migrant workers further mentioned their struggle with foreign language. Many a times they were discriminated against and exploited just because they didn't understand the language. Some female migrant workers working as house maids in gulf countries shared their experience being beaten just because they could not understand the language and failed to do what they were instructed.

Across discussions and interviews, social bondage was observed among almost all female returnee migrant workers who worked as a housemaid. They shared that they were not allowed to come out of the house and were locked inside whenever the house owner wasn't home. They were not allowed to meet or talk to other housemaids in the neighborhood. If they were found doing so, they were beaten. The house owner also controlled the phone calls made by them to their family.

Robbery was reported as another major issue faced by the migrant workers. They were robbed by the native people and sometimes by those from another country for which no legal actions were reported to have been taken.

A vast proportion of participants stressed being humiliated and discriminated for being Hindu. They expressed that they hardly got to celebrate their own festivals and were punished if they were found doing so. Some females also said that they were not allowed to wear vermilion powder (*Sindoor*) or any traditional ornaments. Sometimes, the workers were even asked to convert to Islam.

I was not allowed to celebrate any of our festivals. I had to enjoy their festivals and look after their kids. When I first reached there, they asked me to take off my nose-pin (phuli)

and remove 'tika' from my forehead. – FGD Participant, Female, Kathmandu

Culture shock had been observed in most of the returnee migrant workers. Some reported that they would get arrested if they were found drinking water or eating food during *Roja/Ramazan* (the Muslim festival where they fast for a month between sunrise and sunset). A few participants mentioned that if the festival rules were violated with or without intent, they would be liable for capital punishment.

Participants reported that they were not granted sufficient leave during their tenure in GCCs. They shared that they were compelled to work even when they were sick and could not return to their home country until their contract period was over. A male returnee migrant worker sadly explained that his friend was not allowed to return back home to perform funeral and post-funeral rituals after his father died. Another male returnee migrant from Makwanpur shared his experience of having a huge portion of his salary deducted when he could not work because of a leg injury.

Only a small number of participants reported having good experiences with regards to leave provision. They reported that they were placed in a house with good people and the house owner granted them leave when required.

3.2.10 Legal Issues

With regards to documentation of placement and other related issues, our KII participants reported that there were no records available on the placements of illegal labour migrants and what kind of work they did in the countries they reached. Only the individuals who went through legal process and received a work permit had their placement information recorded in the foreign employment promotion board. A representative from a non-government organization emphasized that many labour migrants adopted illegal means. They did not go through the governmental process for foreign employment and therefore they were not recorded. He further pointed out that it was the responsibility of concerned authorities to check on such illegal practices and save our people from being sold and exploited. A key informant from a rehabilitation organization mentioned that without detailed information about the migrant workers neither they nor the embassy could trace or rescue them and thus they could be obliged to stay there illegally.

The duration of work for migrant workers, after which time migrants became illegal, was reportedly described in the contracts. Some labour migrants were found to have stayed in foreign countries secretly after their contract ended, to earn more money.

Illegal migrant workers, when revolted against not being paid what was promised, were threatened by employers, who said that they would call the police. They were deprived of ID cards, health insurance and other facilities. If they were caught by the police, they were arrested and were liable to face capital punishment, according to a FGD participant from Kathmandu.

Other issues could also lead migrant workers to imprisonment while abroad, even when they hadn't committed any crime. Some migrant workers were found to have been sent to jail for several months and even years. A FGD participant mentioned that one of his friends was imprisoned because he was found to have worked in another company after his visa with his previous company had expired. He did so because his passports were with the owner of the previous company, who was later not in contact with him. When the former employer found about his employee working in another company, he filed a case against him. The worker was imprisoned for about 7 months. He was kept naked behind the bars and was shackled on his hands and legs.

Migrant workers were also found to have been imprisoned when they tried to escape from the company they worked for and were asked to pay huge amount as restitution. Female returnees mentioned that if any women tried to escape from the company/house after being abused or exploited, she would be reported by the employer to the police and get arrested.

Some of the participants mentioned that the use of the death penalty after imprisonment also came to their awareness in GCCs. Lack of awareness and orientation about the rules and regulations of destination countries before arrival has led many migrant workers to face miserable situations in jail. To the knowledge of the participants, there were some cases of the death sentence being applied to the migrant workers. In many cases, the victim could not defend himself/herself as they didn't understand the local language and were thus subjected to exploitation. Moreover, the government of Nepal was unable to help or rescue such workers if they were arrested with evidence.

"At the time of departure, a person from travel agency came and gave him a small pouch. He was told that a person will receive the pouch at Qatar airport. That pouch contained marijuana. Poor guy got arrested and is still in the jail. His father went to the Ministry of foreign affairs, Ministry of labour etc. to appeal for help. Now he will be either released by paying fine or will be given capital punishment."—KII, Male, Dhanusha

3.2.11 Physical Abuse and Exploitation

As mentioned by the participants, physical abuse and exploitation were common among male and female migrant workers in GCCs. They were found to have also worked in sectors in which they were not skilled. A high pay scale was found to be a driving factor to work in the sectors even when they did not have any skills. Some of them worked even without any knowledge about machines and appliances they were using.

In addition, female workers also put forward the fact that sexual abuse and exploitation was a common problem. Some female migrant workers were reported to have been sexually abused by their employers. They mentioned that not only employers but also their guests reportedly abused them.

*“We had to please them, not just them but also their guests. If we refused to do so, we were beaten badly and were not given to eat for days. They threatened to kill us. We were too scared and did whatever they asked us to do”- **Case study, Female, Makwanpur***

Both male and female returnee migrant workers shared instances where labour migrants faced physical abuse by employers when they filed complaint in the embassy.

In contrast, a few female FGD participants mentioned that female migrant workers were sometimes exploited because of their own mistakes. A female participant mentioned that some women working abroad called other Nepalese men over the phone and went out secretly to meet them. They sometimes stole mobile phones from their employers or food out of the refrigerator. She mentioned that these activities were not tolerated and they were subjected to various levels of exploitation.

*“Some women have to go through violence because of their own misdeeds. They cheat their house owner and steal materials from home. Some wanted to earn more money and went for prostitution. It is because of these few women that we have to face various stigma in our community.” – **FGD Participant, Kathmandu***

While many women reported physical and sexual exploitation, some also mentioned that they were treated well by their employers and were supported when required. Some employers allowed the workers to change their work place if they were not satisfied with the work or salary provided.

While many experiences depicted a harsh reality, a female returnee migrant worker shared a different opinion. She mentioned that prior to her departure to Kuwait, she was told about the difficulties that female workers would have to face in gulf countries. She even shared that she was very nervous and equally scared. But when she reached there, she found a different reality. She was taken in by a family and treated very well at their house. She never had to face any exploitation or discrimination. Likewise, some male returnee migrant workers shared experiences about being placed in a good company and getting their salary on a regular basis.

3.2.12 Issues related to adverse weather

Working in extremely hot weather was another major issue mentioned by some of the male participants, whereas females, because they usually worked indoors, did not face such issues. Male participants expressed that they faced difficulties while at work due to high temperatures. Some had to work for hours under very hot sun grazing cattle, picking dates, cutting down trees, or climbing tall coconut trees full of snakes. They reported that they had to put on layers of clothes despite the extremely hot climate so that they would not get snakebites working outdoors.

FGD participants mentioned that people working in a hot climate outdoors continuously for months experienced frustration. Some employers reportedly

visited the workers once in a month and gave them food and a jar of water; the worker had to sustain themselves with the provided food and water for a month.

3.3 Impact

This section highlights the socio-cultural, psychological and other impacts of the issues faced by migrant workers at various stages of foreign employment. It also describes the impact upon the family members of migrant workers back in the homeland.

3.3.1 Socio-cultural Impact

Some participants reported that as they reached their destination country, they had eagerly waited in vain for someone to come and pick them up from the airport. They reported that they were stranded in the airport for a number of days, starved and isolated. Furthermore, female returnee migrant workers from Kathmandu shared that they sometimes had to work for 21 hours at a time, for example from 4am until 1am the next day. They didn't get days off even during festivals.

Family disruption has been observed as an adverse impact of labour migration. Some participants struggled to reintegrate into their families after returning from abroad as a result of their experiences there or their long absence. During our study we came across one woman who had been paralyzed for eight years, trying to jump off a building in Kuwait to escape from her workplace. Through her family members, we came to know that her husband was trying to marry other women and this news had shattered her emotionally. She even attempted suicide, not once but three times, according to her niece.

In most of the families of migrant workers, children were raised by their grandparents. In some communities only elderly people and children could be found. In these cases, grandparents struggled to successfully transfer their culture and tradition to their grandchildren across a huge generation gap. This might contribute to the extinction of our indigenous cultures and traditions. It was also said that since grandparents were unable to closely monitor or check on children's activities, the children sometimes indulged in anti-social activities.

Another socio-cultural impact pertains to migrant workers' reputation and social position within their community. Some of the participants reported worrying what other people in their community would think, if they returned without earning any money. One of the male returnee migrant workers reported that despite having faced many difficulties abroad he decided not to go back home as he feared that his neighbors would doubt his ability and think that he could not do anything.

Almost all the family members of the migrant workers agreed that they felt upset during festivals because they missed their family members who were abroad. They reported that they didn't feel like celebrating any of the festivals without their loved ones. Other participants reported that family members of some migrant

workers celebrated festivals in a grandly with the intention of showing off in front of community. They flaunted their uplifted life standard and wasted money sent from overseas.

Family members were also observed to have felt helpless and stressed about the nature of work the migrant workers were doing. Illegal labour migration of a family member was observed to be another stressor for the migrant's family members. In some cases family members were not able to contact the person abroad for months and did not know about his/her status there. They moreover didn't have any legal document to report the situation.

"Five months ago, my husband told me that he was going to Kuwait. Since he left, I have not been able to contact him. Our child was three months old when he left. I don't know if he is even alive." – **FGD Participant, Female, Kathmandu**

Wives of migrant workers reported that they faced discrimination in the family and community. They were backbitten by other villagers and accused of being characterless in the absence of their husbands.

In addition, some negative coping mechanisms were found to have been adopted by the spouses left behind in the community. The husbands were reportedly indulged in alcohol and married another woman while wives were abroad. Similarly, when men were abroad, their wives were reported to have eloped, involved in gambling, and activities that are deviant to the socio-cultural norms. Breakage in the marital relationship and social disintegration were found to be crucial impacts upon the family members of migrant workers.

"A woman went abroad leaving her six month old baby behind with her own younger sister and husband. But on her return, she found out that they (her husband and sister) had another baby boy. And then she decided to divorce her husband and go back for the foreign employment." – **KII, NGO Worker, Female, Makwanpur**

Children were equally affected by parental separation and conflict.

"My husband was alcoholic. When I left for Kuwait, I left our children with him. I thought he would take care of them in my absence but he didn't care about them, he used to drink a lot and beat them, they didn't go to school. Their education was hampered." – **IDI, Female, Sindhupalchowk.**

While most participants talked about the lack of support systems while in abroad, a few participants mentioned that there was a sense of unity among Nepalese migrant workers. They didn't discriminate anyone on any basis and experienced a greater sense of harmony and co-operation. Many participants agreed on the fact that discrimination and inequity were more often experienced while in Nepal; one of the FGD participants reported that in Nepal, they started experiencing discrimination the moment they entered Kathmandu.

“Here(Nepal) people are separated as per the region they represent. We are all Nepalese there and don’t get discriminated as per our caste and color.”–FGD Participant, Male, Dhanusha

Some migrant workers were found to have reintegrated well in their communities after their return. They were found to have started their own family business or animal husbandry. A few were found to have opened their own restaurants. Some landless people were found to have been leading better life after foreign employment and were able to raise their social status.

Some migrant workers reportedly earned enough money abroad to build houses, purchase plots of land and commence their own businesses after returning, while some came back with chronic diseases and other illnesses. One of the FGD participants reported that she had developed a mental illness and began treatment after her return. Some other participants in the group admitted that the woman displayed unusual behaviors such as beating her own children, chasing them for no reason, not withstanding her own son, quarrelling with people, throwing things around haphazardly, and not letting anyone stay at home.

“I started taking medications for it when I came to Nepal. I could not lift my head, could not recognize people. That’s why I went for treatment. I am all right now. As my mind was not all right, I took the medicine for my mind. My parents spent a lot to save me.”–FGD Participant, Female, Sindhupalchowk

There were reports that disability and disorders acquired abroad further contributed to family disruptions back home. A participant counselor reported that one disabled returnee migrant worker was abandoned by his wife upon his return after losing his legs in an accident while abroad. These cases have also contributed to psychosocial problems among returnee migrant workers and sometimes their families as well.

The participants also talked about community perceptions of returnee migrants. Many of the participants (both males and females) reported that gulf countries were not considered as good as others such as European nations. Returnees from Europe were considered better as they had earned in stronger currencies, while even people who had worked in the post of manager in some gulf countries were perceived as lesser. One of the participants added that people’s preference and valuation of migrant was dynamic and not solely tied to amount earned; \$400 earned in the USA could be valued more than \$800 earned in Dubai.

Both male and female returnee migrant workers reported that they were treated in a satisfactory manner if they returned after earning a good sum of money. But if they returned after being rescued from struggles or various forms of exploitation and without any money, society and even family members blamed them solely for their suffering. They were then left alone with their humiliation.

The majority of female participants reported being victims of negative community

perceptions. They reported that others did not accept them getting married and being part of a family. However, this would not be the case if they had returned from Europe. Participants further emphasized that the Nepalese society tends to stigmatize female migrant returnees, referring to them as impure. These returnees reportedly had a difficulty in reintegration at times following their return.

3.3.2 Psychological and Mental Health Impact

Psychological impacts were very prominent among returnee migrant workers and their families. The words of participants clearly depicted their psychological situation while working abroad and also after their return to their homeland. At the time of departure, most opting migrants were described as happy and excited about the new place they were heading to. On the other hand, the numerous challenges faced at the time of departure sometimes brought psychological distress and restlessness. Some of the participants reported a guilt feeling at the time of departure. They expressed their fear of consequences for the illegal pathway they had adopted for foreign employment and regretted having done so. They were reportedly worried about who would come to receive them at the airport and whom to approach as soon as they reach their destination country.

Some female participants expressed that they were scared at the time of departure as they had heard from other people in the community how women were compelled to enter into illicit relations with their employers and their guests. Some members in the female FGD reported that their flight reminded them of the plane crashes they had heard before; some even shared that they prayed to their god for safety during their air travel. Female participants compared to males were found to be more worried about their family and children in their absence. They reportedly opted for labour migration knowing that their husband or other members of the family would not take proper care of their children. Many of them shared that they had left the country with heavy heart and tearful eyes.

"I didn't feel happy, I left behind my 3 year old child. My husband was not trustworthy, he had extra marital affairs. I could not think of anything rather than my kid." –FGD Participant, Female, Sindhupalchowk

Participants during the FGDs shared about their fearful states of mind, misconceptions and lack of information among themselves. The uneducated migrant workers had worried about how they would read directions and find their way. Similarly, some shared how they didn't know how to use the toilets abroad and controlled their urge to urinate or defecate.

In contrast, a female participant from Dhanusha denied being worried; rather she reported being very excited and not scared at all. Adding to that, some other participants also said that during their journey they had made a mental picture of how they would be supporting their families and their future plans of making money, purchasing mobile phones, laptops and other accessories and sending them to their families back home.

Some of the participants mentioned that people tend to jump into foreign

employment way before they are mentally prepared to do so. They were reportedly excited to leave the country but not prepared enough to go to a new place with new rules and regulations. A psychiatrist interviewed mentioned that the opting migrants were hardly mentally prepared; these people would not usually understand the level of hard work that they would be doing in gulf countries. There often had not been much discussion as to whether a person going for construction work could toil hard in high temperatures. Very few of migrant workers reported being mentally prepared prior departure. Consequently, they would not find a reality abroad that lived up to their expectations, and thus would fall prey to psychological distress.

In the pre-departure stage, lack of proper guidelines, lack of awareness and illiteracy were found to have been the leading causes for psychological impacts upon the labour migrants. Their lack of awareness about legal provisions for safe labour migration caused many to become victim to being cheated by the agents. When those who had been cheated realized this at the time of departure, they were devastated. Illiteracy seemed to have equally contributed to various psychological stresses. These stresses were found to have eventually affected the psychological status of the migrant workers. Some returnee migrants reported experiencing sleeplessness and anxiety over whether they would be able to meet their expectations of a good and high paying job.

Most reported irritation, anger, and aggressiveness that had developed during their work tenure. They further stated that the work situation and environment abroad including high temperature, behavior of the employer, exploitation and abuse were the major triggering factors for their psychosocial problems.

Family separation was found to be another important factor leading to psychosocial and mental health problems. Many had been compelled to choose labour migration to fight their economic status and give their family a better life. However, separation from family members was found to have haunted them throughout their stay abroad. They were found to have been worried about their children and spouses. They sometimes were suspicious about their spouses, few developed problems as a result.

A psychiatrist talked about one of his patients who believed that his wife was having an affair with someone else in his absence. He pressed for a DNA test of their baby after his return. He was not convinced about her innocence even though all of his family members tried hard to convince him. Later he was diagnosed with Persistent Delusional Disorder. The doctor mentioned that he was improving after treatment. He further mentioned that when migrant workers are unable to communicate with their family members back home, they tend to develop depression leading to serious mental health problems.

Climate and adverse environment was found to be one of the factors leading to frustration and stress among migrant workers. Climate extremity was reported to underpin many of the psychosocial and mental health problems experienced.

Robbery and physical violence was found to be another leading cause of such problems.

“I had earned some money working as a truck driver in Kuwait. One day while I was carrying money to the bank to transfer it to my family here, I was robbed. They took all my money. From then I got frustrated. I couldn’t work. I wanted to commit suicide. I didn’t want to come back with empty handed.”– IDI, Male, Makwanpur.

Returnee participants reported that the clash between what they had expected prior to their departure and the reality in gulf countries played a crucial role in aggravating their psychosocial problems. They mentioned that the pay scale was low in contrast to what was assured to them. This further subjected them to different forms of humiliation and exploitation, leading to problems in their psychosocial well-being.

Expectations of family members and workers’ failure to fulfill them were also found to have created psychological and mental health problems. Interpersonal conflicts were also reported by some of the returnee participants. They described a conflict between their aim in going abroad and their worry for family. A FGD participant mentioned that some male migrant workers committed suicide when they experienced pressure from their family to earn more money. The participant mentioned that they could neither explain their family about their situation abroad nor fulfill their expectations. Rather, they would commit suicide to get rid of this pressure. In addition, suicidal tendency was found among males whose wives back home had eloped with someone else, taking all the money that was sent to her.

A large proportion of responses and group discussions pointed to vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and attempts among migrant workers. All forms of discrimination and exploitation faced abroad increased the risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts. Among female migrant workers, some who faced exploitation (physical or sexual), would commit suicide rather than returning back home, as they had fear of not being accepted in their community. Similarly, opting female migrant workers were found to have determined to commit suicide if they faced any form of sexual exploitation while abroad.

“Some women even came back to Nepal being pregnant. Once that happens to a woman, our Nepali society does not accept them and that may lead to suicide.”–KII, NGO Worker, Female, Makwanpur

A Key informant reported that inability to clear the loans was another reason for migrant workers committing suicide. He also mentioned cases where both husband and wife had tried committing suicide. A case was shared where a worker committed suicide during a video chat with his wife and mother when the wife and the mother, who couldn’t stand each other, chastised each other while having a conversation with him.

False accusation has been another leading cause of suicide attempts. A FGD respondent described the case of his friend who was imprisoned for a year without having committed any mistake. He was neither supported by the embassy nor sent back to his country. He had to bear torture behind the bars. He attempted suicide by jumping off a building.

There were some apparent gender differences in the experience of returning from labour migration, which in turn had implications for psychosocial wellbeing. In contrast to the female returnees who were not accepted into the family and society for being pregnant, sexually abused and exploited, the return of male migrant worker, on the other hand, was often a matter of not only happiness but also security for their family members, as shared by one of the counsellors from Dhanusha. They further stated that in their husbands' absence, they had to call other ladies from their communities if they needed any help, as they feared social stigma when calling any male from community.

"If she returns as migrant workers being well off with good earnings then society appreciates her effort and always talk positively about her. But if a female suffers from different hardships including exploitations then society also passes negative comments on her. There is a unit of society which enjoys her sufferings. It all depends upon the earnings they make." - **IDI, Female, Dhanusha**

Some male returnee migrant workers also reported instances where they were perceived differently after their return. They mentioned that they were asked to perform a ritual upon their return for washing away the impurities of the foreign country. This reportedly resulted in frustration and guilt feeling.

"I was asked to perform a ritual on my return to home. My mother thought that since I went to a Muslim country and washed their dishes, worked for them, I need to purify myself with purging rituals." – **FGD Participant, Male, Sindhupalchowk**

One of the male participants of a focus group discussion held in Makwanpur talked about the problems he had been facing since his return. He said that upon his return he could see all of his friends involved in work or businesses, and found them to be different than they had been three years ago. He was sad when he said that he was confused about his future plans, even six months after his return. He described the humiliation and embarrassment he felt when with his friends.

3.3.3 Other Impacts

Impacts of being undocumented

It was observed that because of the lack of information about the details of labour migration, many support systems have not been able to help those workers who needed to be brought back home. No records were found to have been maintained about the exact number of migrant workers working abroad.

"No one knows how many men and women are working in gulf countries. We have no idea even if they are alive. Many women are raped and killed. If we had their information

recorded, we could at least search them. But they just disappear.” – KII, Female, NGO-Worker

Migrant workers who went abroad through illegal means were found to be even more vulnerable to this kind of exploitation. As they reach gulf countries through illegal means, they do not have any legal documents nor does work permit. They are not provided with ID cards and health insurance. This creates difficulties in the rescue process back here in Nepal. Whereas those who have migrated legally with work permit were reported to have been safeguarded against violence and exploitation. It was also easier for the manpower agencies or the foreign employment board to rescue them.

According to a Police Officer, many families approached them to ask for the status of their migrant family members. She stressed the fact that they were unable to track them. It was also stated that even if migrant family members had died, the police could not help. Similarly, a male returnee migrant worker said that the deaths of illegal workers were never reported anywhere and that even if they were killed abroad, their families would never come to know.

Economic Impacts

Some participants stated that they were unable to pay back the loan when they failed to earn as per their expectation. They reported instances where the interest on a loan had increased to more than the original amount, leading migrant workers and their families towards a terrible economic crisis. During the discussion, it was also reported that lenders would threaten their family members to pay back money as soon as possible, thereby making the family members vulnerable to psychological distress.

However, some family members reported that they could pay all their loans with the money that was sent to them and could maintain their household even better than before. A government officer reported that Nepal was one among many other nations in the world in which a major portion of the economy was contributed by remittances from labour migration. Some participants described situations where labour migration had helped people uplift their economic status. The participants reported that they could not have earned their living in their homeland as they were uneducated and lacked skills, but they were able to earn a good amount of money in GCCs despite their illiteracy and inadequate skills. Some were delighted that their families grew financially stronger and their spouses were reported to have started their own businesses such as animal husbandry, purchased plots of land, built new houses and were able to send their children to better schools.

“When I returned, my wife had bought some goats and cows, the business was giving good output. Our economic condition improved after I returned from foreign employment. I bought 5 kattha land. We don’t have any problems to sustain our life now.” –IDI, Male, Dhanusha

The participants reported that they had been benefitted when they landed job as per their contract; those who were semiskilled or unskilled learnt their work and, with time, they even mastered the language spoken in their country of work. Loans were paid off too. A female participant shared how her foreign employment helped her husband to live a better and healthier life. She said that after she left for foreign employment, her alcoholic husband gradually turned into a responsible parent. Similarly, another female participant expressed her interest to go abroad again as she was totally satisfied working there. She reported that in Nepal one could hardly find a good job with few qualifications and without any linkages with the employer, but one could find jobs paying up to Rs.35,000 monthly abroad.

Likewise, one of the participants who belonged to a remote village of Dhanusha reported that he was the first person to buy a telephone for their family; they were the only one to have a telephone in their village. He further reported having earned enough to successfully complete the marriage ceremony of his daughter.

Physical Impact

Disability

Disability was observed to be one of the major negative impacts of labour migration. We found evidence of returnee migrant workers with some form of physical disability. Some participants reported that they developed a physical disability because of their heavy workload. When they asked for help, they were assaulted by their employers instead. They were not given back their passport to return to their home country. Embassy representatives were reported to have given them hope of being sent back to Nepal, but the victims then never heard back from the Embassy.

Similarly, a female migrant returnee in a wheelchair shared her story of when she had to jump off a high building to escape sexual and labour exploitation and became paralyzed. She was sent back to Nepal and ever since has been living a paralyzed life.

Death

Deaths while abroad due to various causes were acknowledged by the participants throughout the interviews and discussions. Participants expressed that sometimes labour migrants were robbed and killed by native people when they travelled carrying money to transfer it to their family back home.

“The robbers beat one person, take all his money and go away. No one could utter a word. If anyone speaks then s/he is killed. I myself saw one person who was robbed and stabbed to death. It is too dangerous.” –FGD Participant, Male, Dhanusha.

Death also occurred due to working in extreme climate. Many deaths while sleeping were reported. They mentioned that when one worked in a high temperature outside and then slept in a fully air conditioned room after a shower, it could result in immediate death.

It was also reported that deaths from road traffic accidents occurred due to difficulties with local traffic rules or language. These could have been prevented

had there been any sort of orientation or training on foreign rules and policies prior to departure.

Some migrant workers were also reportedly sentenced to death. 'Death penalty was a common practice in gulf countries', said a male returnee migrant worker. He disclosed that labour migrants were easily given death penalties if found to have committed any mistakes, and sometimes even due to false accusations.

"A couple of blocks away from my employer's home, a brother raped his sister and killed her then the blame was put on the helper, who was Nepalese. Her helper visa has just expired and [she] was planning to return home in just few days. But she was sentenced to death penalty. I, when these things happened in front of my eyes, was very scared and I pressurized my relatives back home to sell some of my property and get me back to Nepal. She was electrocuted and hanged. It was very scary." - FGD Participant, Female, Dhanusha.

Female migrant workers are prone to rape followed by murder by the house owner or people from outside the house. Female participants also mentioned that housemaids were thrown out of the windows of high buildings and the deaths were reported as suicides. They often were not allowed to come out of the house or try to escape; when some workers were found doing so, they were murdered by the landlord/employer.

One of the key informants suggested that the Embassy and concerned body did not seem to be alert about investigation of the deaths in GCCs. He further stressed the fact that the corpses that are sent back to Nepal are all labeled as natural deaths, but they could see that the bodies were physically damaged. He shared an example where a corpse had no eyes, his stomach was covered with scars and it was clear that his kidneys had been removed from the body. However, the body was labeled as having died from natural causes.

3.4 Coping Strategies

Returnee migrant workers, their families and concerned key informants discussed the coping strategies that migrant workers and their family members adopted to deal with the hardships described.

Self-consoling was reported by the majority of migrant workers as a common coping strategy they had practiced while facing hardships and struggles abroad. Some said that they consoled their hearts thinking about their children, family and their spouse back home, while others just tried to normalize themselves by being determined to struggle no matter what came their way.

Comparing oneself to migrant workers in similar or worse situations was also observed as a coping mechanism to get rid of low self-esteem and feelings of distress. People try to cope with the hardships they faced by thinking about other migrant workers from similar backgrounds who had also left their families, children and homes to earn money.

"There were many Nepalese who had gone there for employment. Not only me, there were other

people who had come from quite a far place compared to mine. I used to think that everyone has come here leaving their family behind. I used to compare with them and try to console myself.”-IDI, Male, Kathmandu

Social media and music were also reported to be common ways of coping with the complications of labor migration. Workers also used video chat with their families. Better means of communication in the modern day have made their lives easier and more convincing as reported by an FGD participant from Kathmandu. Likewise, television and social networking sites like Facebook were also reported by participants as their means of coping. However, one of the participants from Sindhupalchowk added that applications such as Facebook and IMO have been detrimental as many people start having affairs or become intimate with another person while chatting on a regular basis, which consequently affects the migrant worker and his/her families too.

“People watched TV, used the social sites, uploaded joyful status, and engaged among themselves. We sometimes met people from same locality and shared our situation. We have songs, sport to relieve tension.”-FGD Participant, Male, Makwanpur

Small gatherings with other migrant workers and enjoying alcohol consumption were reported as helpful to forget one’s suffering by some of the returnee migrant workers. Eating meals together and sharing their stories and hardships with each other reportedly helped them to realize and accept their situation, providing another means of coping.

In addition, some were found to have indulged in abuse of chemicals such as phenyl, which was easily available around labour camps in industrial areas. In order to forget the frustrations of not getting one’s salary on time, high and extreme temperatures, and continuous family pressure to earn more, some turned to such drugs.

Some of the participants were found to have consoled themselves by attributing their situation to fate. They were found to believe and trust their fate and consoled themselves by thinking that they were destined to face whatever difficulties and hardships they went through. They also thanked their fate when they could do well in their work.

The family members of labour migrants back in the homeland reportedly visited temples to get rid of their pain and suffering. Many also reported that they vowed in temples in exchange for their family members’ safe return to home. This coping strategy was found to be strong among the migrant workers as well as their family members. Some retained faith that God would see everything and that nothing bad could happen to them. Many participants reported having prayed to God to take them out of the sorrows they had suffered.

*“My husband used to call from here every week. We cried on phone. I vowed to **Manakamana mai** that I would visit her after I return from abroad.”-FGD Participant, Female, Sindhupalchowk*

CHAPTER FOUR: AVAILABLE SERVICES, VIABLE POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nepal is a signatory of various labour migration policies and consultative forums on the management of foreign employment and contractual labour and the protection of rights of migrant workers. The Government of Nepal has endorsed a foreign employment policy and act with amendments to address the emerging needs and deficits of labour migration. Despite the existence of legislation and policies and an increase in migrant workers opting to go abroad via legal channels, there are still gaps in the implementation of such legislation and policies. These gaps have hampered the rights and safety of migrants. The cases of labour migrants suffering from abuses, exploitation and financial distress are frequent and impinge on their rights and mental health and psychosocial well-being.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment launched a detailed five-year National Strategic Action Plan in 2015 for the period of 2015 to 2020 which has been approved by the cabinet. The action plan highlights the importance of institutionalising psychosocial counselling services in district hospitals and labour offices. The study revealed that mental health and psychosocial assessment have been ignored pre-departure resulting in deportation of a few of migrant participants from gulf countries on the grounds of lack of mental fitness. Based on the action plan, this study recommends a thorough mental health and psychosocial assessment prior to labour migration.

Similarly, preventive mental health and psychosocial support services (primary– health promotion and specific protection, secondary– early diagnosis and treatment, and tertiary interventions– disability limitation and rehabilitation) are strongly recommended. Health promotion interventions, especially healthy activity programs, health education on mental health and psychosocial support, avoidance of alcohol and substance of abuse programs, anti-stigma campaigns, awareness and sensitization programs, and so forth seem crucial to reducing the impacts of mental health issues on migrant workers abroad. A counselling session before departure could prevent the psychological impact of migration to some extent and enhance preparedness for working abroad. For these reasons, the study team recommends provision of an information desk and counselling corner in the airport which can provide guidance, basic information and psychosocial support services to migrant workers.

Secondary preventive interventions, especially aimed at early diagnosis of mental health and psychosocial problems during the stay abroad, could support effective management of problems and the resultant impact on the family while also increasing the productivity of migrant workers. For these reasons, we believe periodic on the job mental health check-ups are essential.

Migrant resource centres have been established by the government of Nepal in three parts of country to facilitate information dissemination to migrants. These centres provide a range of services to migrants before they leave Nepal in the form of counselling and guidance, and basic information on the general laws in destination countries. These centres can be strengthened by including psychosocial counsellors for providing counselling, basic

psychosocial support services and guidance to migrant workers. The centres can also be improved by establishing a toll-free number through which migrant workers abroad can make queries and calls during office hours.

Tertiary prevention interventions aimed at disability limitation and rehabilitation are equally important in ensuring the mental health and psychosocial well-being of migrant workers. This study advocates institutionalising timely management of disabilities and injuries, providing adequate follow up, building familial and social support and engagement in income generating activities for returnee migrants to facilitate their successful re-integration into the community. Similarly, specific psychosocial interventions targeting survivors of irregular migration, sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking are of utmost importance to address the needs of illegal migrant workers.

Close co-ordination and co-operation is needed between the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Health to better manage psychosocial problems among returned migrant workers. The National Health Policy 2014 has called for the extension of mental health services from hospitals to the community level as well as for the development of more specialized mental health services.

As stated by some of the participants in this study, creating a favourable environment for the promotion of agriculture and other sources of employment opportunities within the country could ultimately help in reducing the negative impacts of labour migration.

Changes in socio-cultural, linguistic, working and climatic environment as well as separation from family members can expose migrants to psychological stress post-departure, which in turn can be dealt with through basic psychosocial support and stress-relieving exercises (deep breathing, relaxation, tension release exercise). Such support would be a great help to people fearing being prosecuted and expatriated under extra-territorial jurisdiction, as the existing mechanism of the Nepal government does not generally address these problems.

There is a need for a mental health research (leading to solutions) and research on migrants' access to health care in destination countries, including that of irregular migrants, who are often denied access to public health services and/or are reluctant to use services that are available to them for fear of being deported.

*"There are facilities for the people vulnerable due to foreign employment. **Shakti samuha** is one such organization that rescues the needy. Second is **SaMi project** that sensitizes the opting migrants on foreign employment and also helps them return back when in problem. There is **Foreign Employment Promotion Board** which does the similar work. **PNCC** also supports employees in returning back to their homeland. Similarly, **IOM** funds to rescue the victims when in difficulties while working as housekeepers, and who is the victim of physical, mental and sexual exploitation. Many women have been able to return back to Nepal by utilizing that fund through **PNCC**." -KII, PSC, Female, Sindhupalchowk*

Financial support for medical treatment of migrant workers and compensation for deaths and disabilities were also reported to have been available for them and their

families. Scholarships for the children of deceased migrant workers were also reported by participants. One of the participants reported that the Government of Nepal provides free education up to grade 12 to the children of migrant workers who pass away working abroad and a compensation of up to 19 lakhs is given to his/her family if s/he dies during the contract period provided s/he is legal and has insurance. Sometimes if the family is very poor, members of the community will collect money and food to provide to the affected family.

A number of participants complained that Nepalese embassies in destination countries exist for image alone and that they do not help the migrant workers when they go there to seek help. Many reported that employees at the embassies ask for bribes.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Migration for economic reasons is a critical geo-political phenomenon in the modern era. In recent years, international migration has grown even further, and is now an important factor in social transformation across all regions of the world. Nepal is one of the largest exporters of cheap and low-skill labour to thriving economies of the world, especially the GCCs.

According to a recent report, 'Labour Migration for Employment, A status report for Nepal: 2014/15', remittances accounted for approximately 28% of Nepal's GDP during the fiscal year 2013/14. Our data support this finding. One government officer confirmed that remittances from labour migration have been a major aid to the country's economy. Nevertheless, it is evident that despite this contribution labour migration has led to a loss of active manpower.

An estimated five million Nepalese people are employed in foreign countries, of which around 40% go to India, while the remaining 60% go overseas, primarily to the Gulf countries, Malaysia, Lebanon and the Republic of Korea. Despite the contribution of remittances to the national GDP, the socio-cultural and psychological impacts of migration on migrant workers and their families haven't been well explored. However, this study attempted to focus on the implications of labour migration on socio-cultural and psychological domains of migrants and their families.

This study found that poverty, unemployment or low pay scale, political instability, social and family pressure to earn more money and the desire to live an autonomous life abroad were the main factors encouraging labour migration. This finding is consistent with the findings of a previous study on labour migration for employment: The pushing and pulling factors behind labour migration are almost the same in Nepal as in other parts of the world. Poverty, limited employment opportunities, deteriorating agricultural productivity, and armed conflict are some of the motives behind international labour migration (Gajurel, 2015). Findings from the study have highlighted that a great portion of the migrating population fall victim to various forms of exploitation and problems, especially those who are illegal or undocumented. The challenges they face include high migration costs (leading often to the taking of loans with high interest rates); navigating the migration process despite illiteracy and poor access to information; being cheated and taken advantage of; difficulties with socio-cultural, ethnic and geo-meteorological adaptation; poor occupational skills; the nature of their work (3Ds: difficult, dirty and dangerous); and gender-based discriminations and violence.

This study has illustrated significant socio-cultural impacts of migration. Migration for labour employment has resulted in disruption of societal and familial cohesion, thereby increasing vulnerability to mental health and psychosocial problems and reducing familial supports that could hasten the recovery from problems. Migration has also resulted in polygamous relationships, lack of guardianship resulting in improper early childhood development, interpersonal conflicts arising from separation and distrust, elopement, stigmatization and discrimination of elopees' families, and humiliation of female returnee

migrants. This study has also shown gender differences in the effects of labour migration on migrant workers and their families. In particular, when females use illegal modes of migration for labour employment they put themselves outside documentation and at risk of physical, sexual and gender-based violence and work exploitation.

Mental health and psychosocial problems frequently reported by the migrants included guilt feelings, sadness, suicidal thoughts and/or attempts, sleep disturbances, excess worries and thoughts, restlessness, feeling of tension and apprehension, hopelessness, irritability, desire for vengeance, harmful use of alcohol (brewed from Phenyl) and psychosis. These findings from our study are consistent with other research. A study of Middle Eastern immigrants from Asia has found that migrants from poorer groups are at a higher risk of mental illness due to their living and working conditions (Arnold & Shah, 1984).

Similarly, our findings suggest that the mental health and psychosocial well-being of returnee migrants continues to be affected negatively in the homeland. This is mainly due to difficulties with reintegration in the community of origin, stigmatizing comments and discrimination against the returnees and their spouse, lack of employment opportunities, financial insecurities and increased familial responsibilities, as well as confusion over whether to stay home or re-migrate.

Our findings also support the assertion of a previous report from the Government of Nepal that workers' actual job description, wage rate and the name of the recruiting agency they migrate through often do not match what is in the contract they sign.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study analyzed challenges faced at different stages of labour migration and its prevailing socio-cultural and psychological impact on migrant individuals, their families, and the community as a whole. Poor socio-economic situation, scanty job opportunities, and desire for improved social status, were found to be major push factors for foreign employment in gulf countries. Unskilled and semi-skilled people were found to have opted for labour migration to a greater extent. For some, however, labour migration was not compulsion but rather an opportunity for international experience.

There were considerable impacts of labour migration upon migrant workers and their families. Many migrant workers were found to have fallen victim to mental health problems and psychological distresses as the reality in foreign countries did not meet their expectations. They were found to have suffered economic hardships, various forms of exploitation, discrimination and humiliation thereby making them vulnerable to self-harm and suicide attempts. Back in the homeland, female returnee migrants were found to have difficulty reintegrating into their communities due to stigma, discrimination and false accusations.

Despite being a good source of remittances, it is difficult to conclude whether the benefits of labour migration outweigh the socio-cultural and psychological impacts faced by migrant workers and their family members. On this note, community sensitization on safe migration and adequate monitoring by concerned authorities call for an urgent action. Besides, multi-layered mental health and psychosocial interventions could address the psychosocial impacts of labour migration and ultimately increase the productivity of migrant workers and their contribution to individuals, families, communities and the nation, as a whole.

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फोन न : ०१४४३१७१७, ४४३७१२४

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization,
(TPO) Nepal

Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: +977-1-4431717, 4437124

Email: tponepal@tponepal.org.np

www.tponepal.org
