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Labour Trajectories and Aspirations of Nepali 'Adult Entertainment Sector' Workers

Karen Snyder, Pauline Oosterhoff and Neelam Sharma

December 2022

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Summary

This IDS Working Paper explores the labour trajectories and aspirations, and the labour intermediaries of Nepali 'Adult Entertainment Sector' ('AES') workers. Our research objective was to understand these experiences to develop more effective policies and interventions to prevent human trafficking as well as labour and sex exploitation. Research included a literature review, interviews with 'AES' workers, and observations in areas with reported elevated levels of human trafficking to visualise the economic activities.

This Working Paper has a companion paper – *Getting Work: The Role of Labour Intermediaries for Workers in Nepal and the International 'Adult Entertainment Sector'* – which focuses on the role of labour intermediaries, their aspirations, and their perceptions about the benefits and costs of facilitating work in the 'AES' and other employment.

Keywords

Nepal; human trafficking; labour trajectories; labour intermediaries; brokers; gender; labour migration; sex trafficking; trafficking in persons (TIP); 'Adult Entertainment Sector'.

Authors

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Neelam Sharma (MBA) is an anti-slavery professional and feminist researcher with over 20 years' experience in human rights issues, focusing on the rights of women, children, labourers, slavery survivors, and marginalised peoples.

Executive summary

Background

Much attention has been given to the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls in Nepal and abroad. Criticism is often directed at informal businesses such as restaurants, folk-music bars (known as *dohoris*), dance bars, massage parlours, guesthouses, and hotels. In anti-trafficking efforts in Nepal, this collection of diverse businesses is often labelled the 'Adult Entertainment Sector' ('AES').

This Working Paper builds upon previous research to examine the labour trajectories and the role of labour intermediaries for 'AES' workers within Nepal and beyond its borders. The paper explores the labour trajectories, aspirations, and perceptions of Nepali workers about the benefits and costs of working in the 'AES' sector. Some labour trajectories into certain venues in the 'AES' include extreme forms of exploitation and human trafficking. The perspectives of labour intermediaries, or brokers, are published in a companion paper.

The research objective was to understand these experiences, perceptions, and aspirations to develop more effective policies and interventions to prevent human trafficking and labour and sex exploitation.

Methodology

We conducted two research studies with one combined mixed-methods research methodology using a victim-centred participatory approach. For this study, we interviewed 57 women and one transgender male, including 19 people who had experience of working outside Nepal. The main research geographical context is Kathmandu Valley and an additional 'AES hotspot' in Dhangadi.

For the companion study, we interviewed 33 adults who identified themselves or were identified by others as labour intermediaries. For both studies we also conducted a literature review and observations in areas with reported elevated levels of human trafficking to visualise the economic activities.

Main findings of the study

Workers who had some international experience were, on average, older than the workers who had only worked in Nepal (31.8 years old vs 24.2 years old). The education achieved by study participants varied widely.

There is no single 'AES' sector in so-called 'hotspots'. All the venues are integrated into the lives and geography of the residential community. Many are unrelated to commercial sex or commercial sexual services and close well before entertainment begins or restaurants open up for dinner.

Participants reported a wide range of jobs/roles in their work history between 2001 and early 2022. The length of time (duration) in a single job varied widely from less than one week to over ten years, including short international trips as part of dance company programmes. 'AES' workers get most of their jobs through their family, long-term friends, and recent acquaintances, which

accounted for 70 per cent of all the jobs reported in this study. Only four of the 240 jobs were found with the assistance of a formal, registered labour intermediary (manpower agency for foreign labour migration).

The most common reasons that participants gave for working outside the home were 'survival', 'financial problems', and 'financial crisis'.

Workers shift around a lot – they move to different venues and different jobs, sometimes after short periods of time and sometimes after an extended period. The most frequent reason reported by participants for leaving a job was simply 'to work elsewhere', which made up 27 per cent of all responses. This implies that the participants did not usually leave a job and while unemployed begin searching for a new position. Rather, workers demonstrate agency within a constrained context, showing that they are open to new opportunities.

Some participants made positive statements about the sector, finding that it was 'good', easy to find jobs, and that singing, dancing, and performing are 'easy'. Many participants pointed out that they work to pay the bills. Several of the participants who had worked internationally mentioned that they were able to travel with short programmes. Several participants referred specifically to the opportunities for work to show their talent, stating that they enjoyed performing.

In order to get a better understanding of why workers continue to stay in the 'AES', they were asked about their hopes and aspirations for the future, including their hopes for future employment. Many workers described aspirations that involved continued work in the 'AES'. Some workers wanted to continue to be singers, dancers, and performers, and described hopes and plans of improving their skills and expanding their audience, perhaps by cutting records, producing their own music, or receiving more publicity about their dance skills. In addition, some workers expressed interest in remaining in the 'AES' but with better pay or more respect from customers, employers, and the public.

Some participants discussed their interest or their wish to work outside of Nepal, both in 'AES' and non-'AES' work. No workers expressed any concerns about costs or debts associated with foreign labour migration. While workers are interested in foreign labour migration for a higher income, many participants also stated that their ideal work location was near home and family in Nepal. In other words, they preferred not to leave their families but felt that travel for work was the only way to earn a decent income. Workers also perceive that being far from home can mean more freedom and some protection from stigma.

Workers also reported many labour and employment challenges, including sexual and labour exploitation. In particular, there were frequent reports of harassment from customers, lack of job security, low pay, underpayment, or not receiving pay at the agreed time or in the agreed amounts. In addition, artists and performers are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of regulation in their industry and employment opportunities. Other workplace challenges include conflicts with and harassment by co-workers, exposing their bodies, the risk of losing jobs based on their looks, and exposure to tobacco smoke. All of these conditions persist in informal labour environments with little regulation or enforcement of labour rights. Participants recognise that their presence and participation as hosts, entertainment, and wellness workers are critical to the

success of the sector for owners, workers, and customers. They have clear ideas about how to improve their working conditions and the sector as a whole. Many participants felt that 'better pay' or 'good payment' and supportive owners would improve their working conditions.

With very few exceptions, study participants did not consider the informal labour intermediaries – e.g. family members, friends, and recent acquaintances who referred them and helped them get jobs – to be responsible for subsequent workplace conditions. In other words, people who facilitate the informal system of finding and getting new jobs are not seen to be responsible for the quality or experience in the workplace.

Study participants described gendered labour constraints and challenges within the 'AES' in general, in the venues, and in the jobs themselves. The most common concerns centred around the customers at 'AES' venues and sexual harassment.

There are reports of labour exploitation and sexual exploitation, and human trafficking in worker and labour intermediary labour trajectories and experiences. Workers reported taking most jobs of their own accord, rather than being forced by labour intermediaries, but exploitation is widespread. Human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and labour exploitation in hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors, both in Nepal and internationally, are due to systematic economic and regulatory conditions and lack of enforcement rather than organised crime networks.

All of the participants identified vulnerabilities that affected their risk of exploitation, including trafficking. Examples of these reported vulnerabilities include: individual factors, such as lack of education; household factors, such as providing financial support for family members and domestic abuse; community-level factors, such as promises by unscrupulous people of good jobs; and structural labour market conditions, such as no written contract, and no social security/insurance safety net. While the list of factors is both extensive and unsurprising, it is also important to recognise the resilience inherent in the work histories, hopes, and aspirations reported by the 'AES' workers in this study. Workers continuously demonstrated creativity and agency to persevere in the face of common hardships.

Key recommendations

1. Acknowledge that *dohori* entertainment is part of a diverse Nepali creative industry. Encourage investment to strengthen the creative industry to cater to different tastes and purses, and the inclusive development of talent of all genders and backgrounds.
2. Business leaders (owners, group leaders, managers) should have the responsibility and the authority to set boundaries and accountability for customers, such as codes of conduct or house rules focused on harm reduction, rather than outlawing alcohol sales and consumption. They could exclude drunk people from entering an establishment, prevent the sale of alcohol to intoxicated people, and ban commission on alcohol

sales. These measures can be strengthened by linking with public health (traffic safety, work safety).

3. Ensure that workers, labour intermediaries, and owners know their rights and have access to appropriate guidance for minimum and maximum rates, working hours, and social protection systems that suit sectors with many small and family-owned enterprises. Moreover, given the current conflicting interests, gendered biases, and labour and wage inequalities, guidance would best be checked, developed, and revised with stakeholders of all genders.
 4. Support workers in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors by ensuring safe, decent workplaces and employment processes.
 5. Avoid confusing terms and concepts of 'Adult Entertainment Sector' and 'hotspot' in policies, regulations, and interventions to end human trafficking.
 6. End anti-trafficking policies and interventions that restrict women's mobility for work and create a demand for rogue services by labour intermediaries that avoid the law.
 7. Trafficking-related interventions should be part of broader labour market reforms that support decent work and mobility of everyone working in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors.
 8. Check that sociocultural norms on gender, labour, and sexuality are taken into consideration in anti-trafficking research, policy, and activism.
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Definition of terms and concepts used in the study

'Adult Entertainment Sector': a term used in Nepal that includes a variety of businesses and venues such as massage parlours, dance bars, *dohoris* (folk-dance bars), cabin restaurants, and guest houses (Supreme Court of Nepal 2008; NHRC 2016). There is no legal definition of the sector. Some businesses and venues can be a front for the sale of commercial sexual activities for adults, including commercial sexual services performed by minors.

'Adult Entertainment Sector' worker ('AES' worker): a term used in Nepal for (mainly female) workers working in a dance bar, dance restaurant, cabin restaurant, *dohori*, or massage parlour (Supreme Court of Nepal 2008).

Forced labour: according to the International Labour Organization Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), forced or compulsory labour is 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily' (ILO 2021).

Gender: the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender-diverse persons. It is distinct from biological sex and outside of the gender binary. Gender is not a synonym for women. Gender is experienced and enacted differently across cultures and time.

Hotspot: an area that has an unusually high level of some quality or activity.

Human trafficking: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (commonly called the Palermo Protocol), defines 'trafficking in persons' as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.
(UN 2000)

Informal economy: all activities that are, in law or practice, not covered or not sufficiently covered by formal arrangements, such as labour law protection, formal wages and benefits, and paying taxes. This term also refers to the nature of the production unit, such as an informal enterprise or household, where economic activity is taking place without formal regulation as a business.

Informal employment: work that lacks social and legal protections and employment benefits. These jobs may be found in the formal sector, the informal sector, or in households.

Informal labour intermediaries (ILIs): generally unregistered individuals or organisations that connect a person seeking employment to the employer. ILIs are diverse; they range from criminal networks and traffickers to semi-legal private agencies or individual middlemen (Chakrabarty and Grote 2009).

Informal sector: the informal sector consists of unregistered and small, unincorporated private enterprises engaged, at least partly, in producing goods and services for the market. An enterprise is unregistered when it is not registered under national laws, such as commercial acts, tax or social security laws, or professional associations' regulatory acts. An enterprise is considered small when it has fewer permanent employees than a certain number (for instance, five employees). The number is set in the national context. An enterprise is unincorporated if it is not a legal entity set up separately from its owners. This usually means that no complete set of accounts is kept. When people produce goods or services just for their own household's consumption, such as food or childcare, this is not counted as an informal sector activity. (OECD and ILO 2019).

Intersectionality: a concept that shows how gender intersects with other aspects of identity, such as age, ethnicity/nationality, ability, education, class, religion, sexual orientation, geographic location, and any other relevant factors, to impact experiences, agency, and access to and control of resources, power, and knowledge.

Labour broker: a person or company that provides labourers to client companies on a temporary basis.

Labour intermediaries or labour recruiters: individuals or organisations that connect a person seeking employment to the employer. They refer to both private and public entities that offer labour recruitment services (Andrees, Nasri and Swiniarski 2015). The former are independent of public authorities, and can be formal such as registered employment agencies or informal such as illegal sub-agents and brokers.

Labour migration: defined as the movement of persons from their home state to another state for the purpose of employment (IOM 2022).

Labour trafficking: as per the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, labour trafficking is 'the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labour or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery' (US Government 2000).

Sex trafficking: as per the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, sex trafficking is 'the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act' (US Government 2000). The Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007 of Nepal considers any of the following four activities, including voluntary sex work, as a form of human trafficking: the sale or purchase of a person for any purpose; engaging someone in prostitution, with or without any benefit; extracting human organs, except where otherwise determined by law; and participating in prostitution (GoN 2007).

Sexual health: a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality, and not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all people must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Acronyms

'AES'	'Adult Entertainment Sector'
CSO	civil society organisation
ERB	Ethical Review Board
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GoN	Government of Nepal
'IAES'	'International Adult Entertainment Sector'
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILI	informal labour intermediary
LI	labour intermediary
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NPR	Nepali rupee
TIP	trafficking in persons
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research project

The Hamro Samman Project is a five-year programme generously supported by the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the British people through the United Kingdom's UK aid and implemented by Winrock International. Its goal is to reduce the prevalence of trafficking in persons (TIP) in ten strategically selected districts of Nepal. Using the '4Ps' framework – prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership – the Hamro Samman Project brings together various stakeholders and implementing partners to reduce the prevalence of TIP. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Snyder Consulting, in partnership with Hamro Samman, conducted multiple multidisciplinary, Action-Research projects using mixed-methods techniques to map trends in priority sectors including trafficking of Nepali workers in the foreign labour migration process and trafficking in the 'Adult Entertainment Sector' ('AES') within Nepal; to improve the knowledge base on TIP; and to identify what works in reducing human trafficking and improving service delivery to trafficking survivors and people at risk of being trafficked.

IDS and Snyder Consulting carried out two research studies on the 'AES' with one combined research methodology. IDS contracted with the Purple Foundation to carry out the data collection for this research project. Purple Foundation serves as a non-profit to address the issues of the people at risk of modern day's slavery and survivors.

The research objectives of these two studies were:

- Describe the labour trajectories for 'AES' workers both in Nepal and in the international 'AES' ('IAES') and the labour intermediaries who facilitate the 'AES' and other employment.
- Understand the knowledge and attitudes of labour intermediaries towards their responsibilities, options, and authority in labour exploitation and trafficking in Nepal and the 'IAES'.
- Explore the labour and labour migration aspirations of different kinds of Nepali workers in the 'AES', including commercial sex workers and labour intermediaries, and their perceptions about the benefits and costs of realising these aspirations.
- Determine if there are strategic points along the labour trajectories into Nepal and the 'IAES' for Nepali workers that are more likely to prevent trafficking and labour abuse.
- Inform interventions to prevent trafficking into the 'AES' in Nepal and internationally and promote freedom of movement, decent work, and safe labour mobility for all genders.

This research contributes to developing targeted interventions that prevent trafficking into the 'AES', while recognising people's rights to desirable work, equality, and freedom of movement. The research may also improve understanding and the need for witness protection as well as increase understanding about choices of victims for formal and informal or practical justice when the people who committed crimes may be close to them, such as family and friends.

This Working Paper describes the labour trajectories and aspirations of Nepali 'AES' workers. The companion paper – *Getting Work: The Role of Labour Intermediaries for Workers in Nepal and the International 'Adult Entertainment Sector'* – focuses on the experiences and aspirations of the labour intermediaries who help workers get jobs and help employers find workers.

1.2 The 'AES' in Nepal and the 'IAES'

1.2.1 Slow domestic job creation, high migration

Agriculture is still the main sector for employment in Nepal, and domestic job creation has been slow. As a landlocked country, Nepal has very high levels of urbanisation and international labour migration rates of predominantly male workers. Since 2018, international remittances have made up almost a quarter of Nepal's annual gross national product (GNP) (World Bank 2020).

Major destination countries for Nepali migrants are Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and India. International labour migration to India requires little paperwork and has a long political and economic history. Labour migration to Malaysia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is regulated under Nepali law (Kharel *et al.* 2022b).

There are major gendered gaps in labour participation and wages in Nepal that disadvantage women and girls (Afram and Del Pero 2012). Although most women in Nepal work, this is traditionally mostly unpaid subsistence farming (Ruppert-Bulmer, Shrestha and Marshalian 2020). Recent data from the World Bank indicates that while wage jobs and better labour force opportunities have been improving in Nepal, most of these improvements benefit men and most women remain in the unpaid and informal labour force (Upadhyaya 2005). This includes agriculture, factory work, and domestic labour as well as hospitality, entertainment, and wellness (spa and massage).

Studies have highlighted the exploitation, including sexual harassment, of migrant workers especially domestic workers who make up a huge part of the female international labour migrant population (Human Rights Watch 2014). Concerns about exploitation of domestic workers have resulted in restrictions for female migrants in the recent past (Pyakurel 2018; ILO 2017). Employment of domestic workers in Gulf countries, for example, was restricted for women under 40 years old and required familial consent.

Reports about the risks and consequences of HIV infection for Nepali sex workers in India and neighbouring countries may have unintentionally strengthened negative perceptions about female international migration (Sarkar *et al.* 2008; Silverman *et al.* 2007; Gurubacharya and Gurubacharya 2004). Sex work is illegal and conflated with trafficking in Nepal (AATWIN 2022). Trafficking for labour exploitation cannot be prosecuted under current trafficking laws. The focus on sexual exploitation of women in trafficking reflects both contemporary views on gender and sexuality as well as colonial legacies and legislation in the region.¹

Since female labourers cross borders for a variety of work, it is important to find a balance between the need to protect workers of all genders and the reality that trafficking for commercial sexual activities is a serious crime. Nepali non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have reported that female labour migrants who want to work are being intercepted and held at borders or even 'rescued' against their will, restricting women's mobility and opportunities to work (AATWIN 2021). Also, the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic changed international labour migration opportunities as well as domestic labour opportunities in Nepal. More women than men permanently lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic (Rayamajhi and Fehr 2021; World Bank 2022).

1.2.2 'Adult Entertainment Sector'

The term 'AES' is used by the Government of Nepal (GoN) policymakers, researchers, donors, and practitioners working to end human trafficking in Nepal (NHRC 2018; Dank *et al.* 2019; US Department of State 2019). There is no legal definition of the 'AES'. It is an umbrella term that indicates a high-risk environment where commercial sexual exploitation is known to occur (Frederick *et al.* 2010). It covers a diverse range of venues that provide hospitality, entertainment, and 'wellness' services including restaurants, *dohoris* (folk-dance bars), erotic dance bars, massage parlours, guesthouses, and hotels (Supreme Court of Nepal 2008). 'Wellness' is a term for a wide range of activities and services, such as massage and spa treatments, which aim to make people feel better or healthier. It is not the same as the term 'wellbeing' used in global health by organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).² Massage can be seen as part of wellness and may include 'happy endings' for men, provided mostly by female masseuses who do not require professional training or accreditation. Ayurvedic massage is a medical service that is acknowledged and accredited by the Nepali state.³

These so-called 'AES' establishments can be classified in different sectors, such as hospitality, entertainment, and wellness, and overlap when restaurants and bars, for example, also offer musical entertainment. Regulation of these sectors

¹ The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 and the Cantonment Rules assigned certain geographic areas suitable for commercial sexual activities provided by local women for British and other European soldiers. Some of the red-light districts on the subcontinent are based in those areas.

² For diverse views, see for example, [What is Wellness?](#)

³ Ayurvedic massage, a traditional South Asian massage, is considered a medical service and falls under the Ministry of Health and Population.

in Nepal is under different ministries, including the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, many if not most of these establishments are small businesses that operate informally without standardised oversight. This makes them a target for suspicions of tax evasion or avoidance of labour and other regulations.

The demand for food, lodging, and entertainment away from home has increased to cater to customers with different tastes and purses, including labour migrants. Tourism has also been an important growth sector for Nepal for many decades. Initially, tourists that arrived in the 1960s were mostly backpackers with small budgets (Shrestha and Shrestha 2012). In recent decades, Nepal has successfully invested in hospitality and entertainment to attract more affluent, often older tourists. Nepal also has an internationally oriented urban young adult population. They prefer modern cultural entertainment, including pop music, dance clubs, and modern art to traditional heritage and entertainment that is directed towards international tourists (Leichty 2017). Thus, 'AES' customers come from diverse backgrounds from within and outside Nepal and have different tastes and purses for entertainment.

One form of entertainment that is often mentioned as being part of the 'AES' in research and policy discourses is *dohori*. *Dohori*, a traditional Nepali improvisational sung poetry performed between men and women is a musical and literary practice (Stirr 2017). The *dohori* tradition is rich, contested and diverse, including improvised song battles between men and women, with marriage as a possible outcome for the winner. *Dohori* performers can be highly professional singers with the kinds of improvisational skills that could be associated with rap or jazz traditions. *Dohori* can also be performed as part of popular culture; for example, by ordinary citizens during celebrations. *Dohori* establishments cater to diverse audiences including international tourists, local male clients, international male labour migrants or families.

Dohori, along with other performing arts, is part of an underappreciated creative industry in Nepal. National and international development efforts have provided remarkably little support for culture and the arts. The creative sector provides inclusive economic growth and economic recovery in the region for vulnerable groups and small enterprises in rural and urban areas (Sonobe *et al.* 2022). The placement of culture, tourism, and aviation under one ministry suggests that cultural consumption and production are aimed at international tourist audiences rather than domestic Nepali audiences and talents. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasises heritage preservation, but this appears to be mostly focused on material cultural preservation (GoN 2022).

There is another side to *dohori*, leading to suspicions about trafficking and extreme exploitation that are of particular relevance for this research. Some *dohori* venues and performers cater to the raunchy or sentimental tastes of male migrants on a night out. Suspicions of the (lack of) morality or the tragic fate of female performers in such venues may fuel the desire of anti-human trafficking practitioners to help them.

Depending on who uses the term 'AES' in Nepal, it can mean an urban sexual landscape catering to mostly male fantasies, akin to what some authors call a 'sexscape' (GoN 2022; Maginn and Steinmetz 2014; Loeffler 2013; Jaiteh 2018).

Commercial sexual activities – which do not have to be penetrative sexual acts – are provided under the guise of services provided by venues such as massage parlours, lingerie shops, wellness centres, or cocktail bars. The concept 'sexscape' is useful analytically as it focuses on the broader dynamic political-economic context and avoids simplistic and potentially offensive 'cultural' explanations or blaming victims of labour abuses such as sexual harassment. 'Sexscapes' are diverse and not necessarily located within one geographical area (Zambelli, forthcoming). The fluidity, sprawled nature, and mobility of establishments and workers in a sexscape hinder the design of long-term interventions.

Some terms and policies, such as the term 'AES', harm the performing arts, as they can be interpreted in a way that suggests that all hospitality, entertainment, and wellness is related to the sale of commercial sexual entertainment. These implicit accusations add insult to injury for workers with precarious livelihoods.

1.2.3 Commercial sexual exploitation and 'hotspots'

Commercial sexual exploitation of minors and adults has been documented in Kathmandu and Pokhara (Oosterhoff and Hacker 2020). NGO staff and the media report labour abuses and human trafficking from cities closer to the Nepal–India border such as Dhangadi, Butwal, Bhairahawa, and Itahari (Kharel *et al.* 2022a⁴). Certain areas in Kathmandu, such as Thamel, and certain types of economic activities, such as dance bars, are notorious for TIP. However, it is important to avoid stigmatising or criminalising whole neighbourhoods or business sectors. A dance bar where men gaze at female pole dancers while seated at a table is totally different from a dance club where young Nepalis go to dance to music played by a professional DJ.

There are also many political, economic, and historical differences between urban areas in international border areas or transit towns, such as Dhangadi, Butwal, Bhairahawa, Itahari, and the capital, Kathmandu. Similar to Kathmandu, district capitals and towns along the border are both destinations for rural migrants and transit towns for international migrants. Each town has its own character, history, and views about hospitality, entertainment, and wellness. Not all towns have international airports for tourists or international labour migrants. Therefore, entertainment in those places is not targeted at those groups. Venues offering commercial sexual services are concentrated in certain areas of these cities and towns. Workers are mostly – but not exclusively – women and girls. Owners and customers are often, but not always, men.

1.2.4 Labour intermediaries

Labour intermediaries or labour recruiters are individuals or organisations that connect a person seeking employment to the employer. They refer to both private and public entities that offer labour recruitment services (Andrees, Nasri and Swiniarski 2015). The former are independent of public authorities, and can

⁴ Also, personal comment from Biswas Nepal staff to Purple Foundation staff, undated.

be formal, such as registered employment agencies, or informal, such as illegal sub-agents and brokers.

The available research suggests that most people who ended up providing commercial sexual services against their will found this work through informal labour intermediaries – people in their own social network, such as friends, family, and acquaintances (Oosterhoff and Hacker 2020). Finding work through informal personal networks is not specific to Nepali people. All over the world, people find work through their personal online and offline networks. Informal labour intermediaries play a central role in labour migration from rural to urban areas and beyond to find work and generate income. Both LIs and workers operate in the same political economy – there are power differences based on access to capital including social capital, but their roles can overlap and may change across a lifetime. The role of labour intermediaries in the 'AES' sector in and outside Nepal is explored in the companion Working Paper focusing on labour intermediaries (Oosterhoff, Snyder and Sharma 2022).

1.3 Positioning workers

1.3.1 Precarious, exploitative working conditions

There is great diversity within hospitality, entertainment, and wellness businesses, which include everything from international hotel chains to backpacker hostels. Working conditions in the Nepali hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors, especially those catering to informal lower-market segments, are often poor. For workers, hospitality and entertainment venues offer jobs with low entry-level requirements, such as bussing tables, waitressing, or grilling meat. Other jobs such as performing classical music, or Ayurvedic medical massages, require years of training.

In general, there are few regulatory frameworks on labour in the lower market segments or in the performing arts. Sexual harassment of women and girls and gender pay gaps in hospitality, entertainment, and wellness are increasingly recognised globally as problematic. Waitresses all over the world have long complained about sexual harassment (Gilbert, Guerrier and Guy 1998; Ram 2018; Poulston 2008). Abuses in entertainment are also well documented, and the #MeToo movement and efforts from women in the global South have aptly illustrated the severity and frequency of the problems (Hillstrom 2018; Pei, Chib and Ling 2021). These sectors may account for the majority of reports about labour abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking – mostly of women and girls.

According to a report published by the National Human Rights Commission, some 'AES' workers have been forced to work under extreme exploitative situations, receive low wages, and are forced to gain favours of customers with commercial sexual services (NHRC 2018). While Nepal does make efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, the rights of women in entertainment, hospitality, and wellness have received little attention.

A Freedom Fund report in 2018 confirmed that out of total workers in a selection of 'AES' venues such as dance bars, *dohoris*, and cabin-restaurants, 17 per cent

were under 18 years old and 60 per cent were working in sexually exploitative environments (Dank *et al.* 2019). The 2019 US *Trafficking in Persons Report* states, 'traffickers increasingly subject Nepali girls and boys to trafficking in Nepal on the streets and in the "AES", including dance bars, massage parlours, and cabin "restaurants" ' (US Department of State 2019).

1.3.2 Vulnerability to trafficking

Anti-trafficking policies, programmes, and interventions are intended to support those most vulnerable to exploitation (UN 2000). In particular, within the '4Ps' paradigm to end modern slavery (prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership), the need to understand vulnerabilities is often cited as a key factor in prevention (US Government 2000).

Recently, ELEVATE and Winrock International produced reports reviewing research to determine human trafficking vulnerability and inform interventions to protect at-risk individuals and groups (ELEVATE and Winrock International 2022, 2021). These reports provide a useful reminder of the need for a 'nuanced understanding of vulnerability' to human trafficking. They highlight four key factors:

- Vulnerability is a result of both risk and resilience.
- The sociocultural context influences how vulnerability factors play out.
- Choice and autonomy in the decision-making process are critical but hard to capture.
- Vulnerability factors come together in complex constellations.

Moreover, vulnerability to human trafficking must be placed in an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner 1992) that recognises individual, household/family, community, and structural factors, and that these factors may increase or decrease vulnerability in both intersectional and multi-scalar dimensions. They may also be contingent and change based on position, circumstances, and lifecycle. Thus, it is impossible and inappropriate to come up with a single definitive list of vulnerabilities to human trafficking, even within the narrower context of the Nepal 'AES'. As mentioned, women resent mobility restrictions imposed on them that are justified by anti-trafficking policies and regulations.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this research was to get a more realistic picture of the labour trajectories, or work pathways, of 'AES' workers as well as the labour intermediaries who mediate between the supply and demand for labour in Nepal and the 'IAES', and to understand their role in and perceptions of human trafficking. The interviews with 'AES' workers and labour intermediaries provide numerous examples of potential vulnerabilities to exploitation that reinforce this call for a more 'nuanced understanding of vulnerability'.

1.4 Rationale/significance of the study

This Working Paper reports the results of a larger study that builds upon previous research to examine the labour trajectories and the role of labour

intermediaries for 'AES' workers within Nepal and beyond its borders. The study consists of two papers: this one, which focuses on 'AES' workers and their labour trajectories, and *Getting Work: The Role of Labour Intermediaries for Workers in Nepal and the International 'Adult Entertainment Sector'* (Oosterhoff, Snyder and Sharma 2022), which focuses on the informal labour intermediaries who help workers find jobs and employers find workers. The purpose is to get a more realistic picture of the labour trajectories, or work pathways, of 'AES' workers as well as the labour intermediaries who mediate between the supply and demand for labour in Nepal and the 'IAES', and to understand their role in and perceptions of human trafficking. To do so we explore the labour trajectories of 'AES' workers, including people who were trafficked into an establishment where commercial sexual services are publicly available, as well as workers who experience labour exploitation in the sexist 'AES' environment. We also explore the experiences and perceptions of workers and labour intermediaries who have recently or are still facilitating 'AES' work in Nepal and internationally.

The main research geographical context is Kathmandu Valley, which is a major destination for rural migrants from different parts of the country looking for work, and the central hub for international tourists. We also investigated the labour trajectories of some 'AES' workers in an additional 'AES hotspot' in Dhangadi.

1.5 Research questions

The two studies with one combined research methodology had four main research questions. This Working Paper addresses the following questions:

1. What are the labour trajectories of AES workers in Nepal and for 'IAES' work?
 - 1.1 What are the labour histories of people working in different venues and businesses within the Nepali 'AES' and the 'IAES' and in different positions in those venues and businesses?
 - 1.2 What are the differences in the length of time in the job in Nepal and the 'IAES', age at entry, types of jobs, or pattern of moving between jobs?
 - 1.3 How do workers move between the 'AES' in Nepal and internationally? Is there a relationship between these sectors or are they parallel universes?
2. What are the labour-related aspirations and hopes of Nepali 'AES' workers and labour intermediaries for jobs in Nepal and international work? Where do people want to work and how do they think they can get there?
 - 2.1 What are the strategies of these workers to implement and realise these work aspirations?
 - 2.2 What are the perceptions about the benefits and costs of realising these aspirations?
 - 2.3 How do the aspirations, labour trajectories, and career and life strategies of workers involved in the 'AES', including commercial sex workers, compare with the trajectories of people who are working or have worked in the 'AES' abroad and came back to Nepal?

2. Methodology

The research design described in this paper was developed and implemented for two research studies with one combined research methodology. The research with both workers and labour intermediaries had the following components:

- Literature review of policy, academic, and grey literature;
- Introductory sessions with Nepali and international researchers, local civil society organisations (CSOs), and 'AES' workers to discuss the research design and implementation;
- In-depth interviews with workers and labour intermediaries;
- Labour trajectory visualisation and narration using a technique called 'River of Life' to describe people's stories of their experiences from first jobs to working in the 'AES' or facilitating work of others in the 'AES';
- Observation and visualisation of activities over the day in 'AES' areas with reported human trafficking;
- Data visualisation of reported trajectories and social networks using **Kumu**, relationship mapping software;
- Feedback analysis sessions with 'AES' workers and other stakeholders.

We used participatory approaches mixed with other expert-led approaches in the design as well as the analysis of the data. The relevance and focus of the research topic were informed by an extensive literature review and previous research. All aspects of the research design and implementation, including categories of respondents, such as labour intermediaries, recruitment strategies, questionnaires, photography, digital photo-editing techniques, selection of spaces, and ways to build trust while checking factual accuracy, were discussed and finalised together by the international and Nepali researchers.

The Nepali researchers worked in Nepal with staff of local NGOs working on decent work and the eradication of human trafficking, to consolidate concepts and discuss how the research could be implemented in the complex local context. Team members were in touch with each other several times a week or day over a period of almost a year to clarify and discuss emerging issues. The data analysis was led by the international experts with many feedback discussions online and in person during the analysis. In-person feedback sessions of the preliminary results were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including field researchers, local CSOs, workers, labour intermediaries, and venue owners.

The rest of this section details the methodological components that are most relevant to this Working Paper. Specific details about data collection with labour intermediaries can be found in the companion Working Paper (Oosterhoff, Snyder and Sharma 2022), and additional descriptions of the methodology are available on request to the authors.

2.1 Introductory sessions

Introductory sessions were held with local CSOs and 'AES' workers to ground the research design within the local context. These sessions were held by Purple Foundation staff and included reviews of the study design, overall research objectives, and research questions. The sessions also involved detailed review of the data collection instruments for 'AES' workers and labour intermediaries.

2.2 Literature review

Recent extensive literature reviews on TIP in Nepal, including laws, policies, and practices have previously been produced, including Oosterhoff *et al.* (2018), Kharel *et al.* (2022a), Kharel *et al.* (2022b), and AATWIN (2022). Therefore, this study did not duplicate these efforts. Rather, these reviews informed this research and were used as background information, including for the definitions section above. Relevant citations are used throughout this report. The authors collected additional literature on relevant topics such as the history of *dohori*, 'AES' policies, the creative economy in Nepal and Asia, legislation of culture, entertainment, and tourism, and related topics in Nepal and the region.

2.3 Population and sampling

For this study we interviewed 58 adults over the age of 18 working or recently working (<5 years) in the AES in various venues and with various jobs in Kathmandu or Dhangadi. The participants included 19 people with foreign labour migration experience. The workers were recruited through two local CSOs, **WOFOWON** and **Biswas Nepal**, which work with 'AES' workers in Kathmandu and across Nepal, and do outreach programmes in 'AES' venues. The study used convenience sampling after challenges with other more random recruitment efforts due to the Covid-19 pandemic and reluctance of workers to participate without prior knowledge and trust of the recruiters. More detailed descriptions of the demographic characteristics are presented in Section 3.

2.4 In-depth interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the workers about their life history and employment history, their sources of support to find employment and how they assessed the quality or safety of particular labour intermediaries. They were also asked about their aspirations and hopes for the future, including foreign labour migration, and desirable qualities and characteristics of labour intermediaries for safe, decent 'AES' employment.⁵

Each interview was conducted by one primary researcher accompanied by a note taker/field assistant. The researcher and field assistant had training and experience in trauma-informed research and were prepared with referral, counselling, and other support services if needed.

⁵ The interview tool is available upon request to the authors.

All interviews were conducted in Nepali after the participants had provided written consent.⁶ The interviews were conducted in person in Kathmandu and Dhangadi in CSO offices, following current Covid-19 requirements. All participants were asked if the interview could be audio-recorded. Three participants refused. For all interviews, the researcher and field assistant took extensive notes. In some cases, workers provided little information while being recorded but provided more information in a more informal way when the recorder was turned off. The interviews took between one and three hours. The interviews were transcribed in Nepali and then translated into English. The transcripts were reviewed for clarity by all researchers, and the interviewers added contextual information where possible.

2.5 Hotspot identification and images

Researchers had previously identified 'AES hotspots' based on the literature and reports by international NGOs (INGOs) and CSOs that listed certain areas of Kathmandu known for human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

To show the different types of economic activities available to the visitor or resident at different times of the day in well-known 'AES hotspot' areas, the team developed a photo-based visual method.

Researchers observed the various economic activities across a 24-hour day to understand the rhythm of these activities, opening and closing times, and the kinds of customers or visitors in the area. This knowledge informed the time during which pictures could be taken to document these activities.

Researchers took photos in Thamel, an area with many international tourists, and Gaushala, a residential and local tourist area. Although they did not enter any establishments and were on the street in public areas, taking pictures at night of some places, especially nightclubs, raised questions from doormen and, in some instances, police. To show the different types of economic activities available to visitors or residents at different times of the day in these three areas, the team visited the areas in the morning, late afternoon, and evening. They made a list of the types of shops and observed the opening and closing times of regular streets in these 'hotspots'.

The team clustered the identified venues into three groups based on their pre-Covid-19 pandemic or post-pandemic opening times. They created a legend with colours to show the different types of economic activities, which included sales of consumable items, such as vegetables and groceries, non-consumable items such as pashmina and handicrafts, wellness and various types of service sector, hospitality and entertainment such as dance bar, *khajaghar* (a small place that serves food, traditionally lunch), guest house, *dohori*, and *gazal*.

⁶ The consent form is available upon request to the authors.

2.5.1 Creating a legend

The team took photos of street views of blocks at different times of the day in these hotspots. A colour-coded legend was created to show the different types of activities. This colour-coded legend was used to create images of street views of the economic activities at different times of day (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Legend of economic activities in 'AES hotspots'



Source: Authors' own.

2.5.2 Applying the legend

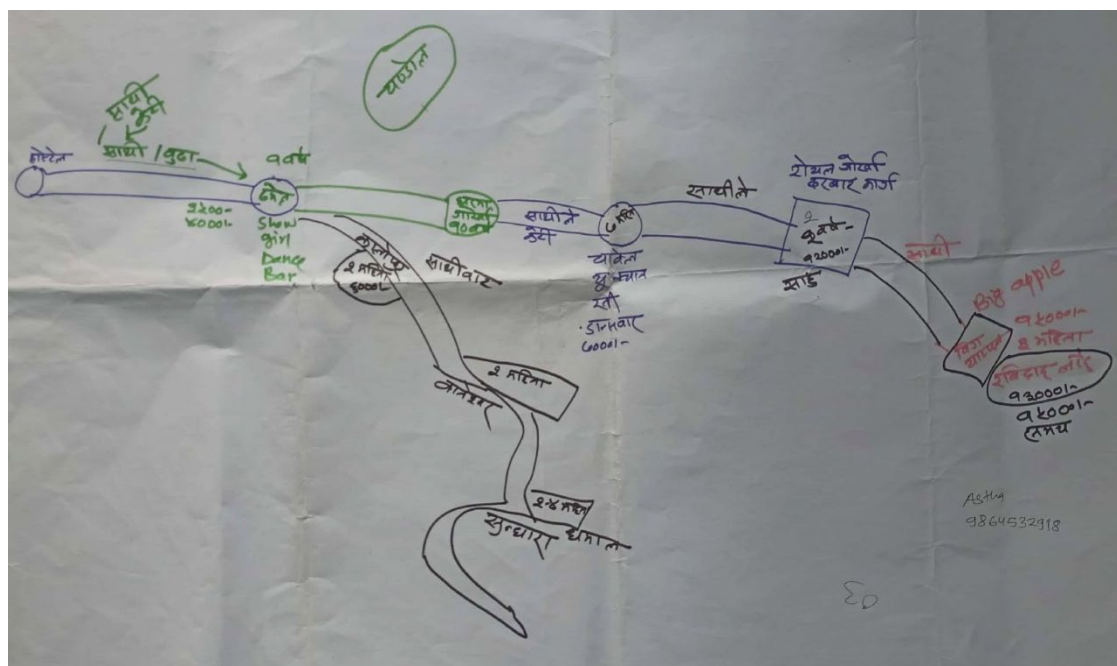
The legend was applied to digitally draw and colour these pictures taken in one spot to show the activities in that spot at different times of the day: 10am (morning), 7pm (evening), and 10pm (night).

The reference photos were converted into visual, anonymised images that map the different kinds of businesses active during different times of the day, using the legend. All identifying features, such as the names of individual businesses, were removed.

2.6 Labour trajectory River of Life

The team used a work history method to systematically collect information on all previous jobs in Nepal and internationally and the methods, links, referrals, and individuals that led to these jobs. The data was collected with oral interviews accompanied by a variation of **River of Life** visual timelines of the labour trajectories of 'AES' workers with information about the labour intermediaries (people, links, referrals) collected systematically and sequentially. This participatory visual methodology is suitable for people with high and low or no literacy, and provides detailed information about each job. A sample River of Life is shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Sample River of Life



Source: Authors' own.

2.7 Labour trajectory visualisation

Work history information was collated in an Excel spreadsheet. The **Kumu** relational visualisation mapping software was used to analyse the data anonymously and to examine patterns in the jobs, venues, and types of intermediaries who were involved in the participants' different labour trajectories into and within Nepali and the 'IAES'.

2.8 Analysis and synthesis

The team developed a coding framework for the interviews of themes based on the research questions about work histories, vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation, personal hopes and aspirations, and desirable characteristics of

labour intermediaries. The interviews were analysed using **Dedoose** QDS by researchers and an external analyst. Careful reading and re-reading of the interviews led to coding and analysis of additional cross-cutting themes. In addition, themes that emerged from the labour intermediary interview analyses, as described in the companion Working Paper (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022), were cross-checked and coded in the worker interviews and vice versa.

To validate the initial findings of the expert-led analysis, the team presented preliminary findings, visualised when appropriate, in in-person group discussions with workers, labour intermediaries, and CSOs to get their feedback about the validity and relevance. They also discussed alternative explanations and shared interests between the different stakeholders, workers, owners, and labour intermediaries, to explore whether there are strategic points along the labour trajectories for interventions and policies against human trafficking.

2.9 Ethical considerations

The IDS Ethical Review Board (ERB) approved this study. The research team in Nepal was trained on research ethics by a member of the IDS ERB on topics including consent, safeguarding, data protection, and Covid-19 precautions. Special emphasis was placed on the importance of objectivity, facts, research ethics and integrity, and referrals to psychosocial care or the police. All participants signed consent forms, and only those participants who agreed were audio recorded. Covid-19 protocols were adhered to during data collection, including hand sanitising, wearing masks, and maintaining physical distance.

2.10 Study limitations

- This study was limited to the information provided by study participants. It was not possible to do external fact-checking of the information reported by the participants.
- Nearly all of the 'AES' workers identified as a woman/girl, with the exception of one transgender man. The data collectors attempted to interview men who work in the 'AES' but were unable to recruit any for this study.
- Convenience sampling was necessary given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and reluctance of workers who were not connected to Biswas and WOFOWON to participate. Since these two CSOs work mainly with *dohori* venues, workers with jobs in these venues are strongly represented in this sample, and so the generalisability of findings to 'AES' workers from other venues is limited.
- All quantitative analysis is only valid for this specific sample and is not representative of the demographics, work history, or use of labour intermediaries of all 'AES' workers.
- Many 'AES' workers change jobs frequently, often staying for only one month or two, and may hold several jobs at one time. Thus, the trajectories may be missing details as memories or knowledge of information may be lacking.

-
- Some participants were reluctant to share details of their work experience and opinions – this reflects their legal position in an informal labour market.
 - Since the 'AES' was closed during the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the information collected in December 2021 – January 2022 is retrospective and may not reflect the post-Covid-19 situation.
 - Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, data collection was limited to Kathmandu and Dhangadi, and may not reflect experiences in other parts of Nepal.
 - Given the limited scope of the study, the observed differences between the sites, the venues, clients, markets, and other findings are not generalisable to all the 'AES'.
 - Work histories and labour trajectories are potentially painful to recollect. Trauma and memory – whether work-related or family-history-related – may lead to lapses in information as well as reluctance to provide full details, as well as fear of recrimination. This means that parts of stories might be missing or described in a vague way to avoid the interviewee being triggered or overwhelmed by emotions.
-

3. Description of 'AES' worker study participants

A total of 58 'AES' workers were interviewed for this study. Of these, 39 participants had only worked in Nepal, and 19 had at least one foreign labour migration experience, including in the 'IAES'. For convenience, those workers who have only worked in Nepal are referred to as 'AES' workers and those who have foreign labour migration experience, including those with 'IAES' experience are referred to as 'IAES' workers. Fifty-seven of the participants identified as a woman and one participant self-identified as a transgender man.

The youngest participants were 18 (the minimum age to participate in the study) and the oldest participant was 40 years old. Workers who had some international experience were, on average, older than the workers who had only worked in Nepal (31.8 years old vs 24.2 years old). Older workers have been working in the 'AES' for longer and have more experience as singers, dancers, and performers. They also have more connections with other 'AES' members, including other workers, owners, and managers. Therefore, it is unsurprising that they are more likely to have 'IAES' experience.

Table 3.1 shows the distribution of participants by caste and ethnicity for 57 of the 58 participants. Overall, Janjati made up 63 per cent (N=36) of the participants in this study, with the remaining participants self-identified as Brahmin/Chettri (26 per cent) and Dalit (11 per cent).

Table 3.1 Caste/ethnicity reported by participants (N=57)

Caste/ethnicity	All workers	Nepal 'AES' workers	'IAES' workers
Brahmin/Chettri	15 (26%)	12 (31%)	3 (17%)
Dalit	6 (11%)	5 (13%)	1 (5%)
Janjati	36 (63%)	22 (56%)	14 (78%)
Total	57 (100%)	39 (100%)	18 (100%)

Source: Authors' own.

The distribution was slightly different for the 'IAES' and 'AES' workers, with 78 per cent of the 'IAES' workers identifying as Janjati (N=14/18) compared to 56 per cent of 'AES' workers (N=22/39). There was a marked difference for Brahmin/Chettri as well, with 31 per cent of 'AES' workers compared to 17 per cent of 'IAES' workers. There was no difference by ethnicity or caste in the findings in the rest of this paper (data not shown). Since this study used a non-random sample taken at a single point in time, and only interviewed workers in person who were located in Kathmandu and Dhangadi, it is not generalisable or necessarily representative of all 'AES' workers, particularly those who are currently working outside Nepal.

The education achieved by study participants varied widely as shown in Table 3.2. While five participants reported that they had not attended school at all (9 per cent), at the other end of the spectrum, 20 participants (34 per cent) had completed secondary school through grade 12, and two participants reported some post-secondary education. The distribution of education varied by age. All of the participants who had not attended school were older (aged between 26 and 37), reflecting the recent achievements by the Nepali government to get girls into schools (GoN 2018, 2015).

Table 3.2 Education levels reported by participants (N=58)

Education level	All workers (N=58)
No school	5 (9%)
Some primary school	5 (9%)
Completed primary school (class 5)	11 (19%)
Completed lower secondary (class 8)	15 (26%)
Completed higher secondary (class 12)	20 (34%)
Post-secondary	2 (3%)
Total	58 (100%)

Source: Authors' own.

The majority of participants stated that one or more of their parents was involved in farming or agriculture (65 per cent), which is in line with the agricultural economy in Nepal. Other parental occupations included foreign employment (N=4), business or retail (N=6), and labour (N=3).

Eighty per cent of participants rent their home, and over half live with family (parents, spouse, children, other relatives). There are some negative perceptions and stigma associated with 'AES' work. Living with family members may add strain for female 'AES' workers, who must keep their employment hidden from household members. On the other hand, living with family may help normalise 'AES' work and reduce stigma for some 'AES' workers. Living with family members may provide additional safety and security compared to living alone or with friends, as well as reduce expenses for participants who are required to contribute to supporting their family.

Half of the 'AES' workers who have only worked in Nepal are married compared to 69 per cent of the workers with international experience. This distribution in the sample is probably a reflection of the older age of 'IAES' workers who participated in our study, as older women have had more time to get married. About half of all participants have children and they all reported their marital status as married, divorced, or separated. No unmarried participants have children. In general, migration bans on foreign labour migration for women under the age of 30 and restrictions related to marital and parental status for Nepali females may also contribute to this age difference for 'AES' and 'IAES' workers; however, this aspect was not explored in the study (ILO 2015).

Finally, 30 of the 58 participants started working before the age of 18 (52 per cent), including 12 (20 per cent) who started working outside the home aged 14 or younger, despite the minimum legal age for employment being 14 (GoN 2000). Further discussion about first working age is in Section 4.7.

4. Key findings

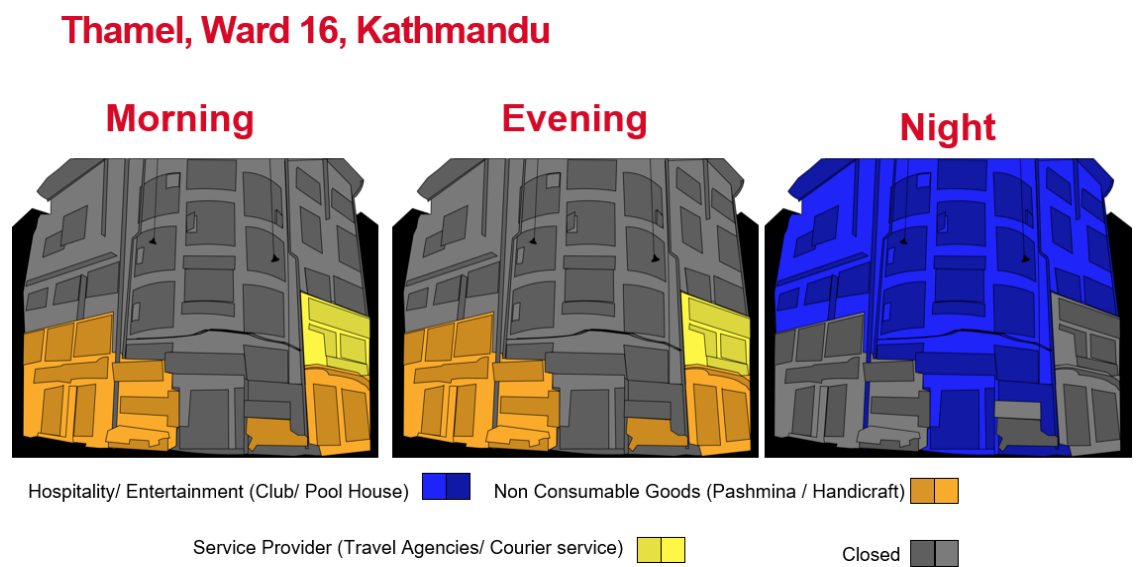
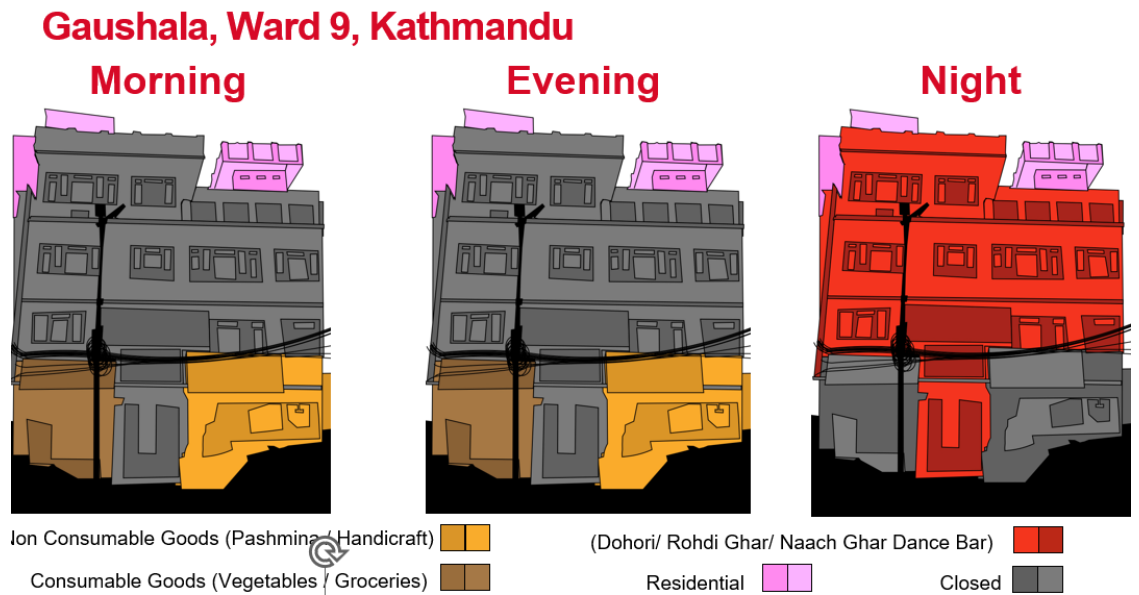
In the following sections, the key findings from this research are described, with a focus on the workers and their labour trajectories. Responses to the research questions as well as cross-cutting themes are discussed. Cross-cutting findings emerged from the overall study, including the work with labour intermediaries. As noted above, all worker participants have worked in 'AES' jobs and venues in the last five years.

4.1 Cross-cutting: unpacking economic activities in 'AES hotspots'

As part of the combined research methodology, the team investigated the economic activities, locations, and communities that are commonly labelled 'AES hotspots' by donors, government agencies, and NGOs. For a full discussion of this issue, please refer to the companion Working Paper (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022). Anonymised images of three Kathmandu-area urban 'hotspots' were produced, showing the morning, late afternoon, and evening. The images show mixed informal commercial venues and residential housing in these urban areas. All the venues are integrated into the lives and geography of the residential community. Many are unrelated to commercial sex or commercial sexual services and close before entertainment begins or restaurants open for dinner.

The evidence shows that there is not a single 'AES' sector in designated 'hotspots'; rather, there are many different jobs and activities that are carried out by workers in different venues and establishments that fall under this misnomer umbrella term, including those in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors (see Figure 4.1). Moreover, these businesses and activities take place throughout communities in rural and urban areas. These are important and growing sectors in Nepal, operating in a volatile and uncertain market with rapidly shifting customer tastes and purses.

Figure 4.1 Business activities in Gaushala and Thamel wards, Kathmandu



Source: Authors' own.

4.2 Research question 1: What are the labour trajectories of 'AES' workers?

4.2.1 Jobs reported by 'AES' workers

We received descriptions of up to five consecutive jobs per participant for a total of 240 jobs.⁷ All 58 workers described at least one job, and 35 participants described five jobs. Participants reported a wide range of jobs/roles in their work history. By examining the job type as well as the establishment where the job took place, the jobs were categorised as 'AES' or non-'AES'. For example, construction labour is categorised as non-'AES', while singer, dancer, and performer are considered 'AES' jobs. Certain jobs such as 'cleaner' that took place in 'AES' venues, such as *dohoris*, are considered 'AES' jobs, while a cleaning job that took place in a non-'AES' venue such as a private residence is considered non-'AES'. Annexe 2 contains a list of all the job titles reported by workers in their work histories. The start date ranged from 2001 to 2022, with eight jobs that started in January or February 2022.

The length of time (duration) in a single job varied widely from less than one week to over ten years. Some jobs have a very short duration and some of these may be because the study took place in early 2022, when the Covid-19 pandemic had led to massive layoffs and inconsistent employment for the two preceding years. The average duration in 'AES' jobs in Nepal was 15.5 months, which is much longer than the average duration of 5.5 months in 'IAES' jobs. As will be discussed below, participants reported short international trips as part of dance company programmes, which may explain this difference. Non-'AES' jobs reported by participants generally had longer durations than 'AES' jobs, with an average reported duration of 22 months.

Overall, 51 per cent of all 'AES' and non-'AES' jobs were singer/dancer/performer, 20 per cent were waitress, 17 per cent were non-'AES', such as labour, cleaner, or factory work. In total, 14 per cent of all 240 jobs were international jobs – a mix of 'AES' and non-'AES'. Keep in mind that international jobs were reported by 19 participants and that these 'IAES' participants also reported jobs that took place in Nepal.

4.2.2 Venues and workplaces reported by 'AES' workers

Participants described working in over 27 different types of venue, or establishment, for both 'AES' and non-'AES' jobs (see Annexe 1 for a complete list of venues reported by participants). The most frequently occurring establishment was *dohori*, accounting for 44 per cent. This is unsurprising as the participants were recruited through two local CSOs that do outreach in 'AES hotspots', often with *dohori* workers. Workers reported doing more than one job in a single type of venue (see Table 4.1). The jobs reported in *dohoris* included cleaner, hostess, singer/dancer/performer, and waitress. Dance bars were the

⁷ Participants described only 3 out of 240 (1 per cent) instances when they held more than one job at a particular point in time. Detailed information was not collected on the second job and the second jobs are not counted or included in this analysis.

second most frequently cited establishment, accounting for 22 per cent of all jobs, and participants carried out activities as hostess, singer/dancer/performer, waitress, and DJ/bartender.

Table 4.1 Job titles for diverse 'AES' venues

Type of 'AES' establishment	Job reported by participants for these venues
Cabin restaurant / <i>khajaghar</i> / <i>bhatti pasal</i> (small eatery)	Cleaner General food worker Owner Singer/dancer/performer Waiter/waitress
Casino/club, snooker, or pool house	Casino worker Cleaner Singer/dancer/performer
Dance bar	Bartender DJ Host/hostess Singer/dancer/performer Waiter/waitress
<i>Dohori</i>	Cleaner Host/hostess Singer/dancer/performer Waiter/waitress
Normal restaurant	Singer/dancer/performer Waiter/waitress
Hotel/guest house/apartment	Casino worker Cleaner Sex worker Singer/dancer/performer

Source: Authors' own.

Participants reported a large list of non-'AES' establishments such as canteen, factory, online clothing sales, and cleaning company. As discussed in Section 4.2.5, workers moved between 'AES' and non-'AES' jobs throughout their labour trajectories. It was noted that seven of the 'IAES' jobs were through dance companies or institutions – these are short-term jobs where a group of entertainers are contracted to perform together for a short period of time without having to move away for long periods from their family.

Some participants described working in different jobs in a single establishment. A few workers described taking a first 'AES' job; for example, as a cleaner. As they gained work experience and built connections, they looked for opportunities to become singers, dancers, or performers. While workers were asked the name of the venue for each job, the information collected was inconsistent due to memory

as well as frequent changes in ownership and business names. Therefore, no analysis by specific venues or businesses was undertaken.

4.2.3 Labour intermediaries reported by 'AES' workers

For each job in the River of Life work history, participants were asked who referred them to that job, and who helped them get the job (e.g. who was the labour intermediary). Information is available for all but two of the 240 jobs reported by participants. Only four of the 240 jobs were found with assistance of a formal, registered labour intermediary (manpower agency for foreign labour migration). All of the other jobs were found through informal, unregistered labour intermediaries. Many participants stated that they had found the job through a 'friend', and in this case, they were further asked how long they had known this friend and how they had met them. Based on this information, the reported informal labour intermediaries were grouped into six categories (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Labour intermediary reported in 'AES' worker labour trajectories

Category of LI reported by participants	Per cent of all LIs (N)
Family member, including partner/husband, parent, aunt and uncle, cousin, and sibling	25% (60)
Friend for one or more years	25% (59)
Recent acquaintance known for less than one year through the 'AES'	20% (48)
Self (no LI)	16% (38)
AES venue owner, manager, or client/hotel guest	12% (29)
Manpower agency for foreign labour migration	2% (4)
Total	100% (238)

Source: Authors' own.

It is striking that the majority of 'AES' workers get most of their jobs through their family, long-term friends, and recent acquaintances, which accounted for 70 per cent of all the jobs reported in this study. This is similar to reports received by other researchers on workers' trajectories into the 'AES' (Dank *et al.* 2019). The labour intermediaries interviewed also reported that they mostly work with people they know (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022). More detail about the patterns of finding jobs in different venues through different labour intermediaries is discussed in the next section.

Each person who works in the 'AES' has a different experience and a different trajectory through their work history. This study does not cover the entire work history of all 58 'AES' worker participants, as not all participants described all of their job history, and only up to five consecutive jobs are included in this analysis. Therefore, the following descriptions can be considered typical of many 'AES'

worker trajectories but are not considered representative of the work trajectories of all 'AES' workers.

4.2.4 Reason to start working outside the home

As described earlier, 30 of the 58 participants (52 per cent) started working before the age of 18, including 12 (20 per cent) who started working outside the home at age 14 or younger, below the minimum age of employment (GoN 2000). The most common reasons that participants gave for working outside the home were 'survival', 'financial problems', and 'financial crisis':

What made you start work away from home?

I had household problems. I have my elder sister and mother. My father passed away when I was just a year old. When father passed away, we had financial crisis. Later, I couldn't manage schooling expenses so I left school and started helping my mother and also working.

How old were you when you first started working?

I was 17 years old when I came to Kathmandu for work.
(Female waitress with international experience, 29)

What made you start work away from home?

My husband left me when I had a two-year-old baby. He had an extra marital affair and on top of that we have an inter-caste marriage. We are now out of contact. Now, I stay with my mother and have to earn money for survival and also to look after family members.

(Female waitress in Dhangadi, 23)

There is nothing unique to 'AES' workers' experience of poverty and household financial hardships in Nepal. However, the lack of a safety net and need for a job that does not require specialised training or experience are certainly risk factors for potential exploitation in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors.

As the two examples above show, financial crises and the need to earn money happen in both birth household and adult household environments. Participants whose parents were ill, had passed away, or were divorced or separated described financial insecurity growing up and often started working at particularly young ages. Some described 'gathering firewood' or 'doing labour alongside my father' to bring some money into their family household. Others described being sent to work as domestic labour in other households with the promise of education, or 'selling sweets on the bus' for an aunt or other relative. Sometimes they were obligated to work in order to support the educational costs for male household members:

I came here for no specific reason but again my father had an accident and couldn't work anymore so I had to look after my household and also help my brother to go to school, so I started working.

(Female dancer, 21)

Participants also described being 'abandoned' by their husband, or escaping an abusive situation and being forced to get a job to support their children.

What made you start work away from home?

I wanted to work for myself. I had to look after my own personal need as well as also had to look after my family. I got married at the age of 13 and gave birth to a baby boy at the age of 14. I got divorced when my younger daughter was seven years old.

(Female singer in Dhangadi, 30)

After... I came to Kathmandu, I used to work in other people's houses and earn to allow my children to go to school. [Otherwise] I wasn't even able to go buy vegetables.

(Female dancer with international experience, 29)

Some participants believe that it is easy to find work and earn money in the 'AES'. The ease of finding work is partly explained by a number of participants who pointed out that there are no qualifications or educational requirements for employment in this sector.

Why are you doing this job?

One thing is that I don't have job and in order to get a job, I don't have any academic qualifications. Second thing is we get this job quickly as it doesn't need any documents. It promptly helps to earn money and I can promptly get things as wished.

(Female sex worker, 20)

Some participants explained that they started working outside the home in order to be independent and pursue their dreams. In particular, several participants mentioned that they started working in order to pay for their continued education.

What is your major reason behind working out from the home?

For the study purpose, I came to Kathmandu. In order to cover the study expenses and livelihood purpose, I joined the work.

How old were you when you initially started working?

I was 17 years old.

What obliged you to leave home and make you work at that young age?

We were seven brothers and sisters. Parent told me that if I want to study further on my own effort, it's ok otherwise they will make my marriage.

(Female hostess with international experience, 38)

The reasons for beginning to work in the 'AES' are varied. Some workers wished to pursue creative performance opportunities:

What is your major reason behind working outside the home?

I was fond of singing since childhood. In order to carry out my singing journey, for the sake of work and study (as parent were unable to afford for my study), I entered into Kathmandu.

(Female singer, 22)

Musicians and dancers are part of an underfunded creative industry, with few opportunities to perform or develop professionally, except in bars, restaurants, hotels, and *dohoris*. Resilience and a desire to chart their own paths was noted by several participants, including their passion for singing, dancing, and performing.

What made you start to work away from home?

To be able to live independently and respect my passion.

What obliged you to work living away from home or [in] this place?

I wasn't doing anything after completing 12th standard. To spend some time working, I came to Kathmandu with my cousin. I liked singing since childhood. After coming to Kathmandu, through a 'known sister', I started working at a dohori.

(Female dancer with international experience, 27)

A desire for more independence, a change of scene, or self-expression for some participants also included decisions to pursue foreign labour migration and earn money for themselves and their family. They reported that cousins and friends helped them with the preparations. One participant stated that they were 15 (with false papers stating they were older) when they went to Dubai as a domestic labourer.

4.2.5 Labour trajectories

In order to describe the labour trajectories of 'AES' workers both in Nepal and internationally, the team analysed their work histories to look for patterns in types of jobs, types of venues, and types of labour intermediaries. Workers' choices are constrained by the wider political economy. Yet they also have agency; the

hopes and aspirations that pertain to these work histories are explored in the next chapter. Box 4.1 shows an example of a work history that was recorded using the River of Life methodology described in Section 2.6. The names and locations of the establishments have been removed to protect confidentiality.

Box 4.1 Work history recorded using River of Life

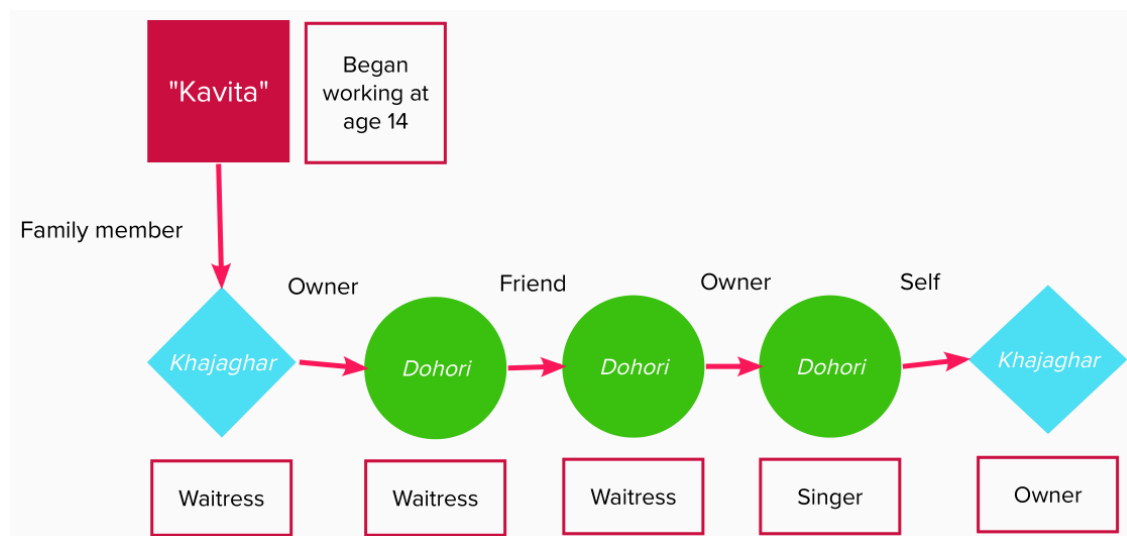
I used to work in [a] village carrying sand and bricks for a hospital under construction. I joined the work at the age of 17. I was paid 300 NPR [Nepali rupees] per day. After working for five months, I felt sick and left the job. After treatment, I decided on my own to go to Kathmandu. There, with the help of village friend (who was also a singer in the same dohori), I joined AAA dohori as a singer. The salary was 7,000 NPR per month. I worked for six to seven months.

Then, I returned to village and after staying for two to three months there, I returned to Kathmandu where I joined BBB dohori. It was my same friend (who worked in the former dohori) who helped me get the job. The salary was 9,000 NPR per month. I worked there for nine months. After one-month gap, I joined CCC dohori. I found this job myself. The salary was 11,000 NPR per month. I worked for four to five months.

*Then, I started working at DDD dohori. I joined it through 'known sister' (who had just started to work in this same dohori as a wait[ress]). The salary was 12,000 NPR. I worked for 11 months. After that, I joined EEE dohori with the help of my friend (who was working in the same dohori and the owner was also familiar/known). I was paid 11,000 NPR per month and worked for six to seven months. Then, I started working at FFF dohori. This time the owner himself approached me for a job as he had observed me singing in the EEE dohori. I worked for one and half years and was paid 14,000 NPR per month. Then I joined GGG dohori. It was one co-worker brother who helped me get this job. The salary was 13,000 NPR. I have been working here for a year.
(Female singer, 26)*

The example in Box 4.1 highlights many of the themes that came up in the 'AES' worker interviews. This woman described eight different jobs in nine years. While she reports that her salary generally increased over time, her latest job has a lower reported salary than her previous job. Note that she does not mention tips or commissions, which are an important part of worker's income – a topic that will be discussed further in Section 4.5. She describes moving from her village to Kathmandu but then moves back and forth several times. She has found jobs by herself (without assistance from a labour intermediary), as well as through long-term friends from the village and recent acquaintances that she knows from working in 'AES' venues. She was also recruited by the owner of a *dohori*, who observed her skills at a different establishment.

Figure 4.2 'AES' labour trajectory example



Source: Authors' own, created using MURAL. Reproduced with permission.

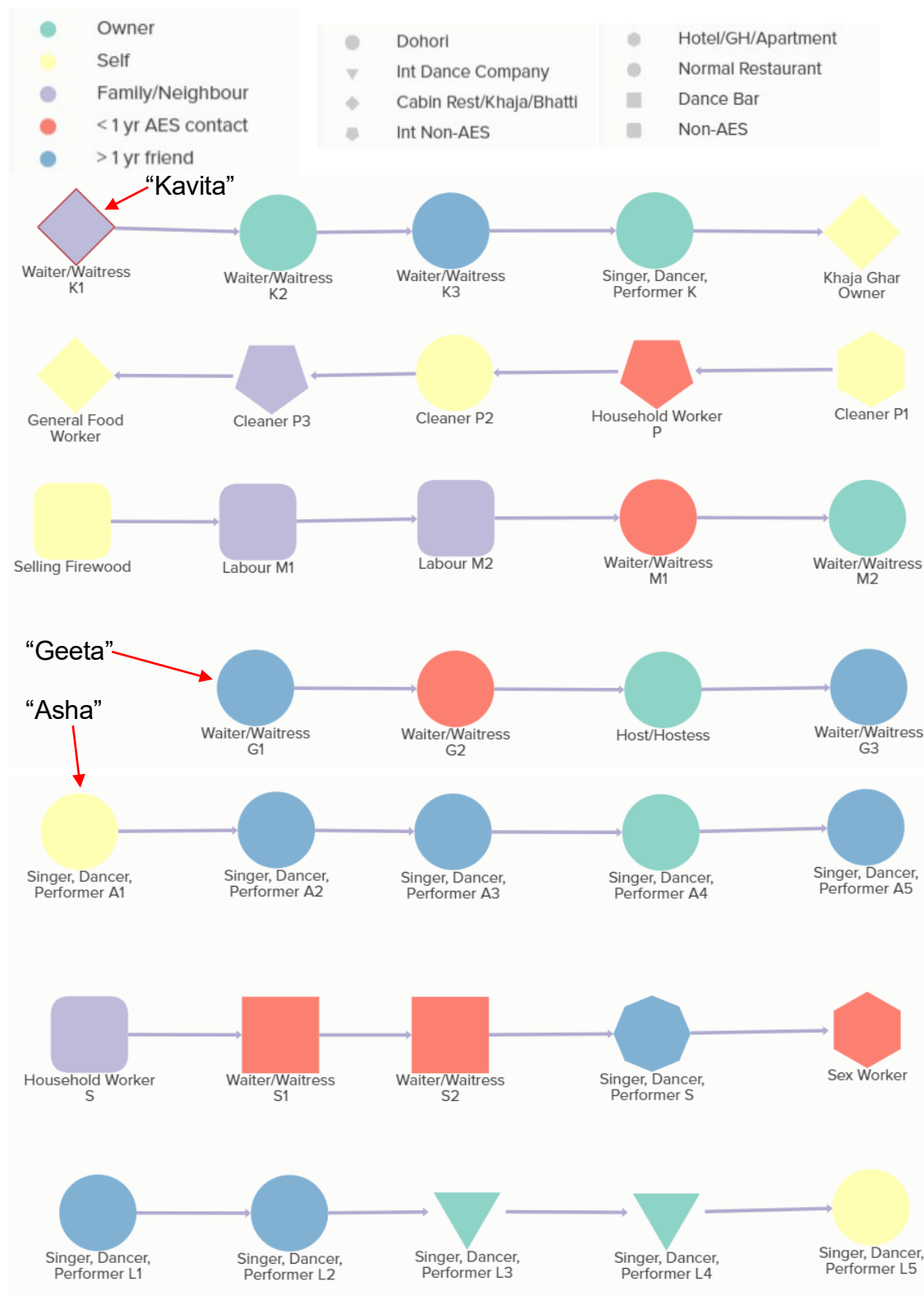
A visual example of a work pathway of a different individual also helps illustrate worker trajectories. In Figure 4.2, coloured shapes show the different venues, with the labour intermediaries shown above as an arrow to the next job. The job is indicated below the venue.

This is a fictionalised name for a real anonymous work history from one of the 58 respondents.⁸ This woman, 'Kavita', began working at age 14 (the minimum legal age for work in Nepal). A family member got her a job at a *khajaghar* (local restaurant) as a waitress. The owner of a *dohori* then got her a waitress job at their *dohori*. A long-time friend helped her get a job as a waitress at another *dohori*, and then an owner of yet another *dohori* got her a job as a singer. Finally, she started her own *khajaghar*. In this example, the participant has moved from being an employee in a *khajaghar* to an owner and *khajaghar* employer, perhaps hiring her own staff.

Kumu relational mapping software was used to visualise the labour trajectories of study participants. This interactive link shows a **Kumu visualization of seven fictionalised individuals** based on the actual data from the interviews. Each individual is an anonymous example, and representative of certain characteristics. The data is factual, based on comprehensive interviews conducted in 2021–22. A static copy of the interactive and more detailed visualisation is shown in Figure 4.3.

⁸ Note: pseudonyms have been used for participants to protect their anonymity.

Figure 4.3 Kumu visualisation of seven individual trajectories



Source: Authors' own, created by Jessica Meeker using Kumu and published under the **Kokua Licence**. © Institute of Development Studies 2022.

In Figure 4.3, the shape indicates the venue; for example, circles represent *dohoris*. The colour of the shape represents the labour intermediary who helped the participant get their job, e.g. purple means a family or neighbour, while blue indicates a recent acquaintance that the participant knows through 'AES' work.

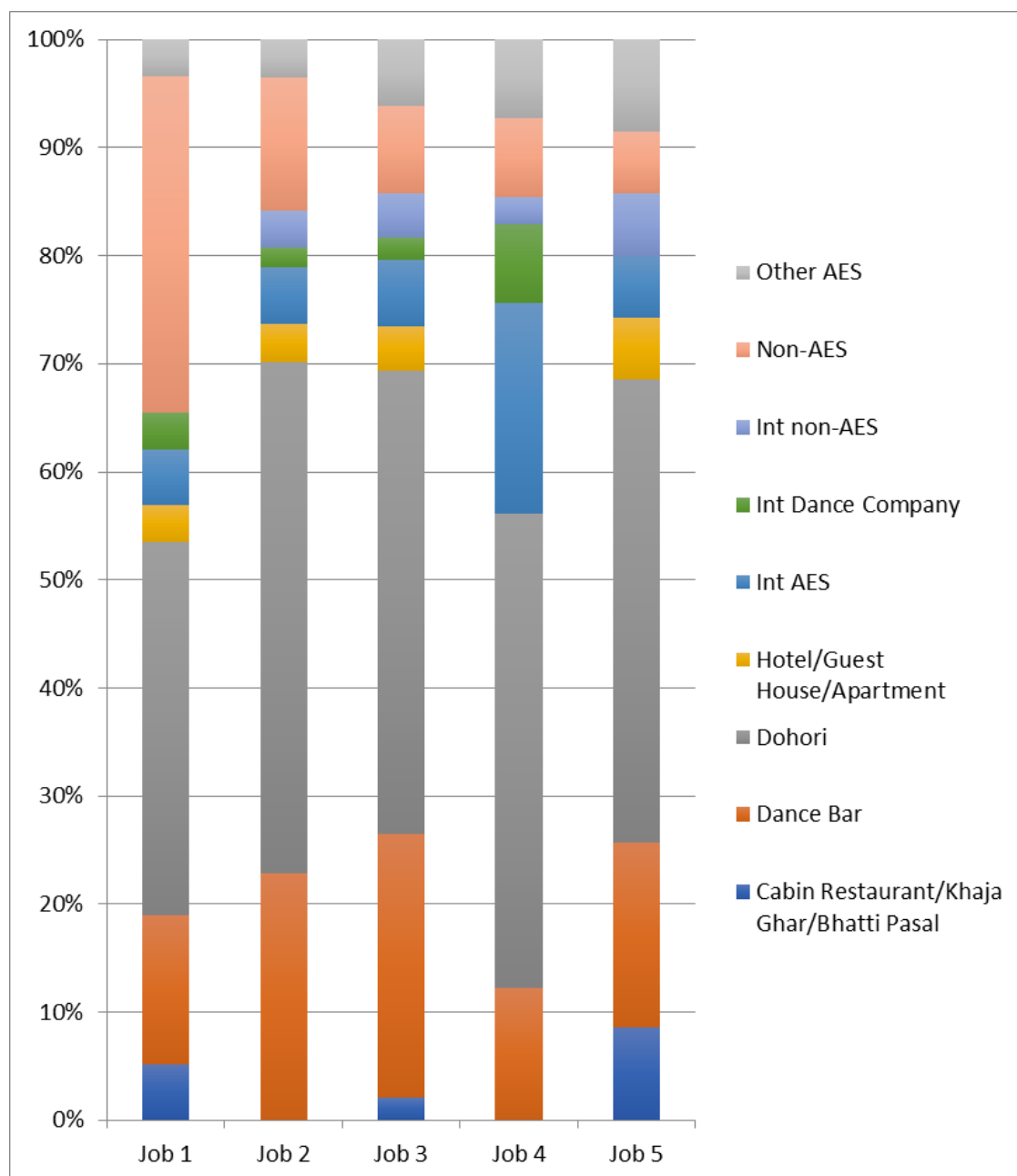
Here are two more examples of anonymised individuals who have always worked in *dohoris*. 'Geeta' completed secondary school before starting work in a *dohori*. She got jobs through friends, recent acquaintances, an owner, and another friend. She has worked as a waitress three times and as a hostess. Meanwhile, 'Asha' has had jobs in five different *dohoris*. She has always worked as a singer, dancer, and performer. She got her first job on her own, and then her next jobs through a friend, another friend, owner, and another friend.

It is clear that even for just these seven individuals, there are a mix of colours (labour intermediaries), shapes (venues), and jobs. In order to examine patterns in labour trajectories of 'AES' workers, the trajectories through up to five jobs for the 58 workers were analysed. The reasons that workers shift between jobs will be discussed in Section 4.2.6.

First, the types of venues and establishments were examined by job history. The venues listed in Annexe 1 were grouped into ten categories. Figure 4.4 shows the category of venue for each job in the workers' trajectories. Each column represents a job, from the first reported job for all 58 participants, through to the fifth reported job with information from 35 participants. The stacked column shows all the different venues that were reported for each job, with different colours representing the ten categories of venues as shown in the legend.

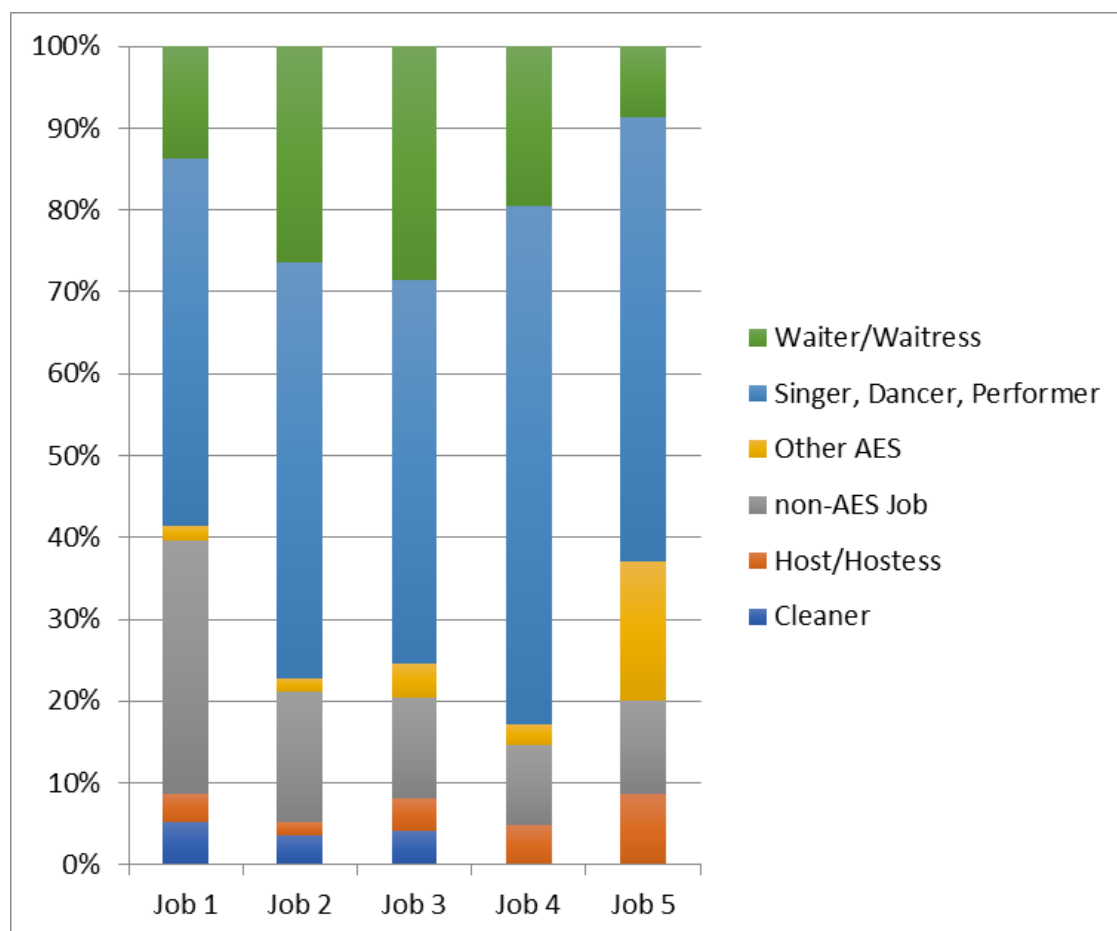
Of the first reported jobs, 34 per cent took place in *dohori* (N=20/58, dark grey) and 31 per cent of jobs were in non-'AES' venues (N=18/58, salmon pink). Looking across all five reported jobs, or the grouped labour trajectories, *dohori* constituted 44 per cent of all venues, as described in the previous section. Of all fourth jobs, 27 per cent took place in 'AES' venues including international dance companies. This is probably because by their fourth job, people have more experience and are more likely to have the skills needed to get hired for these jobs and the connections to navigate foreign labour migration papers and costs. Workers explained that the drop in 'AES' to 6 per cent of all fifth jobs was due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns all over the world, with foreign labour migrants sent back to their home countries.

Non-'AES' venues were reported through all five jobs reported by respondents, comprising 31 per cent of all first jobs, down to 12 per cent of all fifth jobs. Study participants were recruited through CSOs that support current 'AES' workers, and so it is less likely that their most recent reported job will be outside of the 'AES'.

Figure 4.4 Job history by job venue

Source: Authors' own.

A similar analysis of the job types by job history also shows a lot of variation for participants over their work trajectories. The many jobs reported by participants (as shown in Annexe 2) were grouped into six broad categories: singer/dancer/performer, waiter/waitress, 'AES' cleaner, host/hostess, non-'AES' job, and other 'AES' job. Figure 4.5 shows the category of job type for each job in the workers' trajectories. Each column represents a job, from the first reported job for all 58 participants, through to the fifth reported job with information from 35 participants. The stacked column shows all the different types that were reported for each job, with different colours representing the six categories of job types as shown in the legend.

Figure 4.5 Job history by job title

Source: Authors' own.

People can have the same job, such as singer/dancer/performer, whether in Nepal or international venues. 'Cleaner' means 'cleaner in an "AES" venue', and people who had jobs as cleaners, such as in private residences or international cleaning companies, are in the non-'AES' job category. Other 'AES' jobs include bartender, casino worker, sex worker, masseuse, and DJ.

As noted earlier, 'singer/dancer/performer' was the most commonly reported job title across all five jobs, ranging from 45 per cent of all first jobs to 63 per cent of all reported fourth jobs. While some 'AES' workers are only singers or only dancers, many perform both singing and dancing in their jobs. Some participants described this as a way to enter the 'AES' without a lot of experience.

What are the positive aspects of the AES?

One thing is we are able to show our talents here.

(Female dancer, international experience, 33)

How and why did you choose to work in dohori as your first job?

It was easy to find the job as my sisters used to work in the same sector as well. Also, I had talents regarding singing and dancing, so I joined dohori as my first job.

(Female singer, 21)

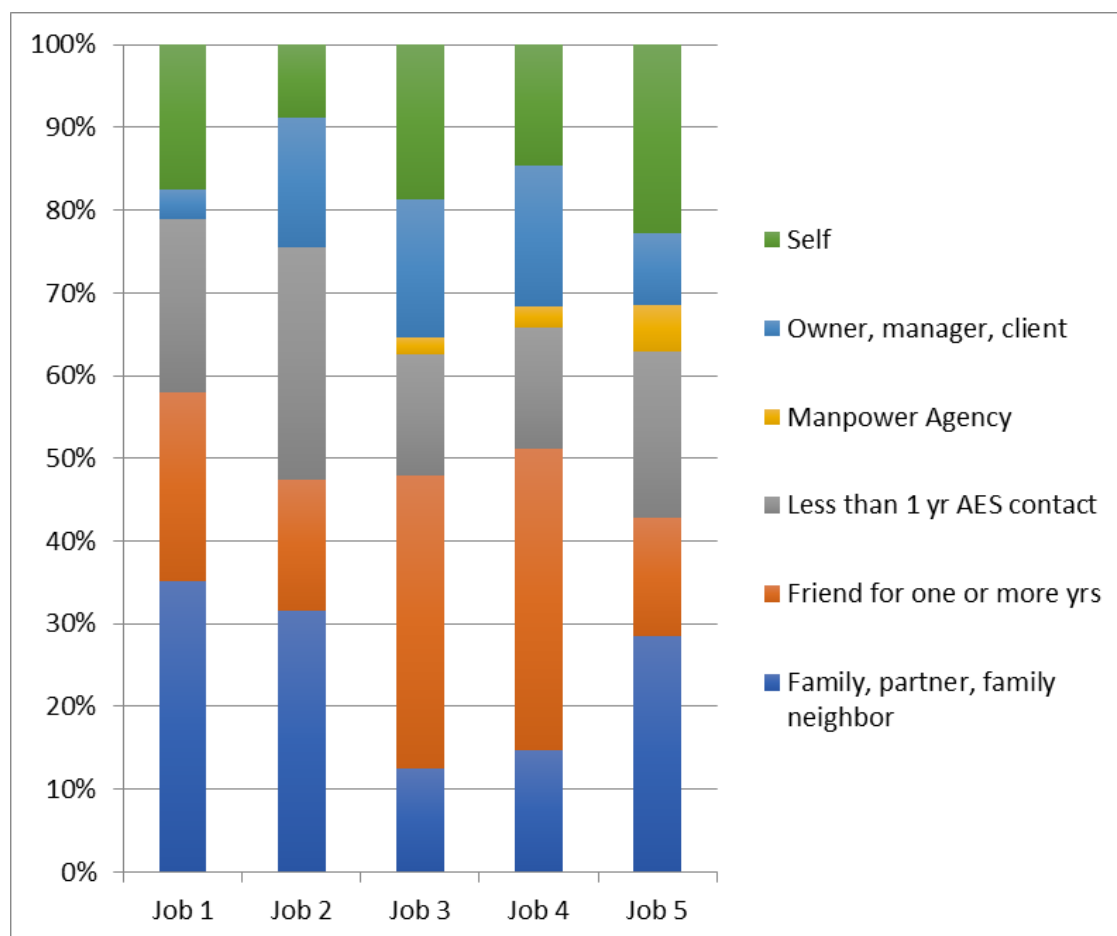
However, it should be noted that many of the participants described non-'AES' jobs for their first job (N=18, 31 per cent), and these included construction labour and factory jobs (data not shown). Unskilled labour and construction jobs provide low-paid temporary employment opportunities for people starting on their work pathways.

Participants reported working as 'AES' cleaners for the first three jobs, but not for the fourth or fifth job. In contrast, a higher proportion of participants reported working as host/hostess in the fifth job (9 per cent, N=3/35). This may indicate that increased experience and more connections within the 'AES' have allowed participants to move to better-paid positions.

In order to understand how 'AES' workers get jobs and move through their labour trajectories, the team also looked at the job history and the labour intermediaries who helped participants get jobs. Figure 4.6 shows the category of labour intermediary for each job in the workers' trajectories. Each column represents a job, from the first reported job for all 58 participants, through to the fifth reported job with information from 35 participants. The stacked column shows all the different labour intermediaries that were reported for each job, with different colours representing the six categories of labour intermediaries as shown in the legend.

The labour intermediaries are grouped into six categories: self, owner/manager/client, manpower agency, a recent acquaintance known for less than one year through 'AES', a longer-term friend they have known for at least one year, and family member/spouse or partner/family neighbour. As discussed above, most labour intermediaries are family members, friends, and recent acquaintances.

Most participants (35 per cent) received help in getting their first job from family members – some parents, but mostly siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and husbands. Family members continued to help workers get jobs all the way through their work histories. Long-term friends of participants helped them get 27 per cent of their first jobs and continued to play an important role – they comprised 37 per cent of the labour intermediaries for fourth reported jobs. Recent 'AES' acquaintances – people met through 'AES' work who they have only known a short time – helped workers get jobs between 15 per cent and 28 per cent of the time. Manpower agencies (formal registered labour intermediaries) only show up as labour intermediaries for third to fifth reported jobs for foreign labour migration for some 'AES' participants. Similarly, owners of other venues, managers, and clients are more likely to help get jobs after the first job – once the workers have a bit more experience and more connections.

Figure 4.6 Labour intermediary by job number

Source: Authors' own.

Sometimes, participants reported that they did not receive help from anyone to get their job and these instances are categorised as 'Self' in this figure.

4.2.6 Reasons for leaving jobs

As shown, it is clear that workers shift around a lot – they move to different venues and different jobs, sometimes after short periods of time and other times after an extended period.

Participants were asked why they left each job described through the River of Life.⁹ Reasons included:

- 'To work elsewhere';
- Covid-19 pandemic;
- Fired or otherwise forced to leave;
- Harassment or exploitation;

⁹ The question was only asked to those who had left their job – it was not asked of people who were currently working in a job at the time of the interview, December 2021 – February 2022.

- Low pay or other negative workplace condition, such as not paid or not fully paid;
- Personal or family reasons;
- The venue shut down;
- The programme ended;
- Their visa was declined;
- There was no work;
- A small 'other' category of unique responses.

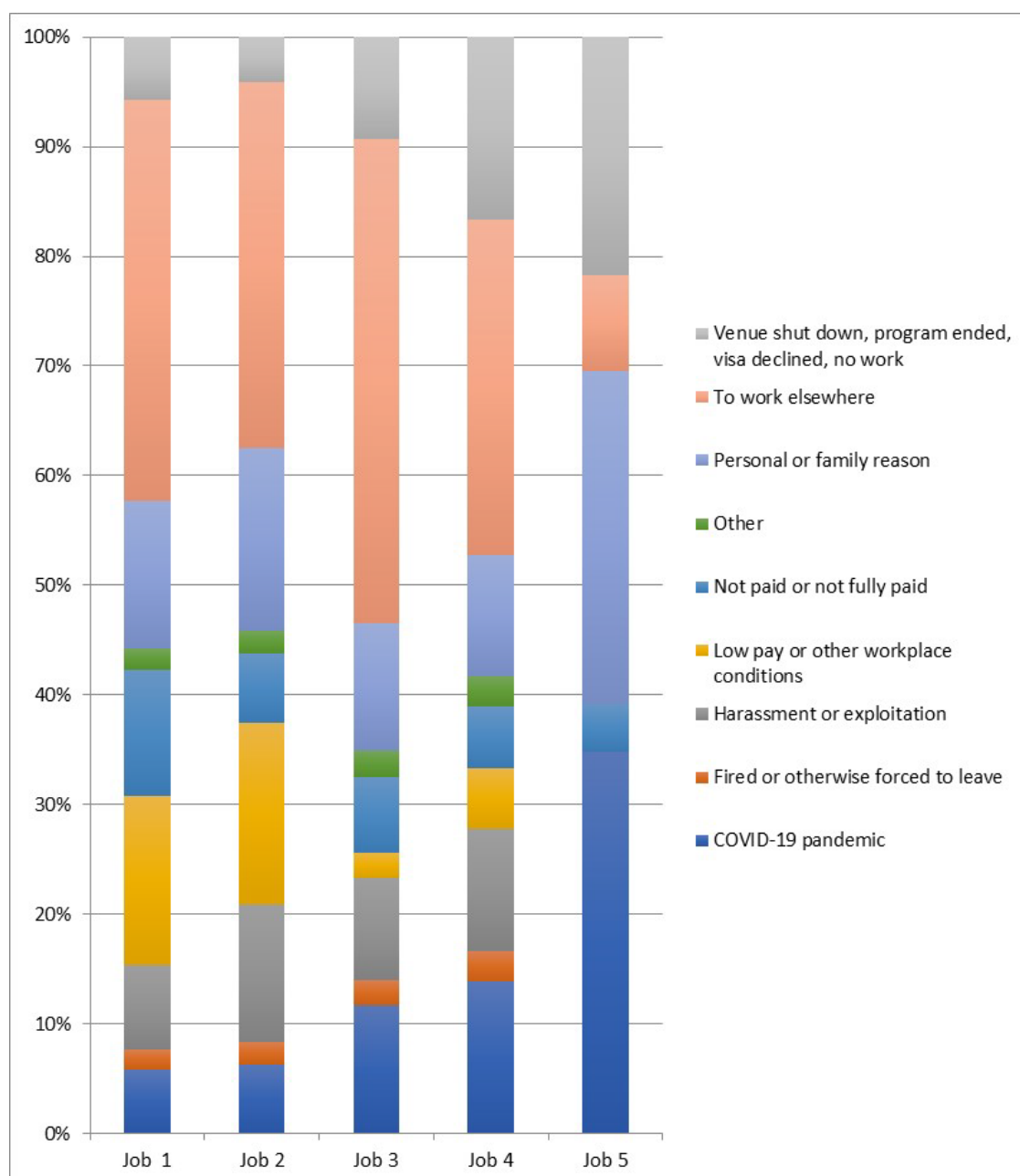
What is most notable is that no workers stated that they had been misled about a job and its working conditions by the informal labour intermediary – family member, long-term friend, or recent 'AES' acquaintance who assisted them in obtaining the job. Figure 4.7 shows how these reasons change over the work history of the participants as a whole.

For the first job, most people said that they left to work elsewhere (37 per cent of reported reasons to leave a job). Low pay, not getting paid, and personal reasons also came up quite frequently. For every job but the fifth job, most people stated that they left their job to work elsewhere, without providing additional pushes or pulls to relocate. For the fifth, and generally the most recent job, the most frequent reasons to leave were Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns (35 per cent), personal or family reasons (30 per cent), and venue closure (20 per cent).¹⁰ The researchers believe the two latter responses are also largely additional consequences of the pandemic.

There are additional constraints that affect workers' decisions and choices for employment. Many participants reported low pay, wage theft, and workplace harassment and exploitation (discussed in later sections). The majority of international jobs ended because the participant 'had to return to Nepal', the programme ended, or their visa expired. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic and personal or family reasons, such as pregnancy or ill parents, constrained the opportunities that were available for workers to pursue higher income or better working conditions.

The most frequent reason reported by participants for leaving a job was simply 'to work elsewhere', which made up 27 per cent of all responses. This implies that the participants did not usually leave a job and while unemployed begin searching for a new position. Rather, workers demonstrate agency within a constrained context, showing that they are open to new opportunities.

¹⁰ Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns were cited by some participants as the reason for leaving their first to fourth jobs because they had begun working quite recently and had less job experience. They had experienced the Covid-19 lockdowns in an earlier reported job.

Figure 4.7 Reasons to leave job by job number

Source: Authors' own.

As shown in the detailed work history in Box 4.1, workers move between venues frequently. In the following example of leaving a job to 'work elsewhere', 'Shantini' was working as a waitress at a *dohori*.

One day a guest [customer] who came to the dohori said he will find a better job for me, where I could sing... I worked here around four months and left. The man [guest] took me to another place. There I started singing songs.

(Female singer, 21)

Participants left about 15 per cent of jobs due to poor working conditions, harassment, or exploitation, and these reasons were given more frequently for earlier jobs in their trajectories. It is possible that workers who are starting out take jobs that are available and offered to them, and as they become more experienced with 'AES' businesses as well as more skilled, they are able to identify or advocate for better working conditions. Only a very few participants reported leaving a job because they were fired or otherwise forced to leave by their employer (four individuals reporting on a single job each). The following quotes provide examples of harassment and exploitation reported by some participants:

I left because the owner made me uncomfortable and he would try to get close to me. I was given good tips by the customers, but he would get mad when I danced for others. He never made any direct sexual advances, but I was very uncomfortable; he also had a wife.
(Female international singer, 40)

Due to the age discrimination (they used to give preference to youngest one rather than us) and caste discrimination (as one of the friends/artists and owner as well used to discriminate me on the basis of caste), I left the job after working for one year.
(Female dancer, 35)

What was the payment agreement for your services?

It was Rs. 4,000 per month.

How much were you actually paid?

I did not get paid actually.
(Transgender male waiter/singer, 22)

These findings of labour mobility and labour abuse are crucial to understand for effective anti-trafficking efforts. Based on the narrow legal definition linked to the Palermo protocol and other legal frameworks, these workers may not be trafficked but that does not mean they are not exploited or have free choice to work or develop themselves. They also move around and between various sites of exploitative work, which suggests that a 'hotspot' approach that focuses on 'AES' venues in a certain geographical area is limited. More discussion of trafficking and exploitation within the 'AES' is found in Section 4.6.

4.2.7 Patterns in labour trajectories

While the above figures show individual pathways, the team wanted to investigate whether there are patterns in labour trajectories and labour intermediaries for 'AES' workers. As discussed in Section 4.2.5, these analyses were carried out with information for up to five mutually exclusive jobs (e.g. a cleaning job in the 'AES' is counted separately to a non-'AES' cleaning job), venues (e.g. a *dohori* in Nepal is counted separately to an 'IAES' venue), and labour intermediaries. Analysis of all participants' work histories showed intense fluidity and variation in the pathways and labour trajectories in jobs, venues, and labour intermediaries. No discernible directional patterns were found. The researchers then decided to stratify the analysis and created Kumu visualisations to examine patterns for smaller groups of 10–12 'AES' workers with similar demographic characteristics and work experience.

The figures below present the **Kumu visualisations** that show trajectories by venue for groups of workers with similar characteristics or work histories. Visualisations by job type or labour intermediary were very similar and are not shown. The static pictures are shown here.

Figure 4.8 shows the trajectories and pathways for participants who had at least two IAES jobs and reported on five jobs. Workers reported 'AES' and non-'AES' jobs in GCC countries; several had done short performance programmes in Africa; and even more had worked in various 'AES' jobs in India.

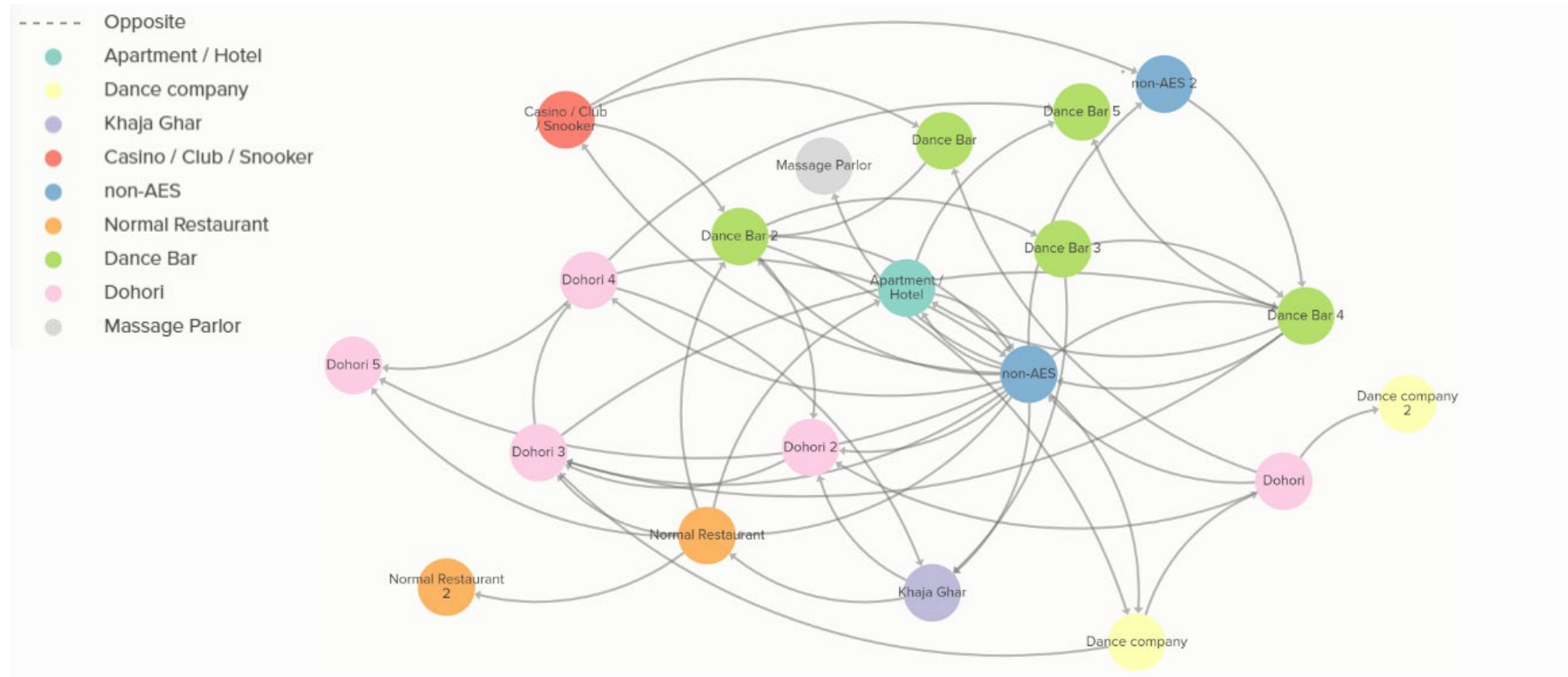
The trajectory lines in this visualisation show workers moving between venues and between different types of venues with no linear pattern.

Figure 4.9 shows the trajectories and pathways for participants who reported on at least four jobs and stayed in at least two jobs for a very short time, less than one month (also discussed in Section 4.2.1). The researchers were curious if there would be clear patterns in the types of venues or jobs for these frequent job changers.

Again, workers shift between venues and jobs with no discernible linear pathway.

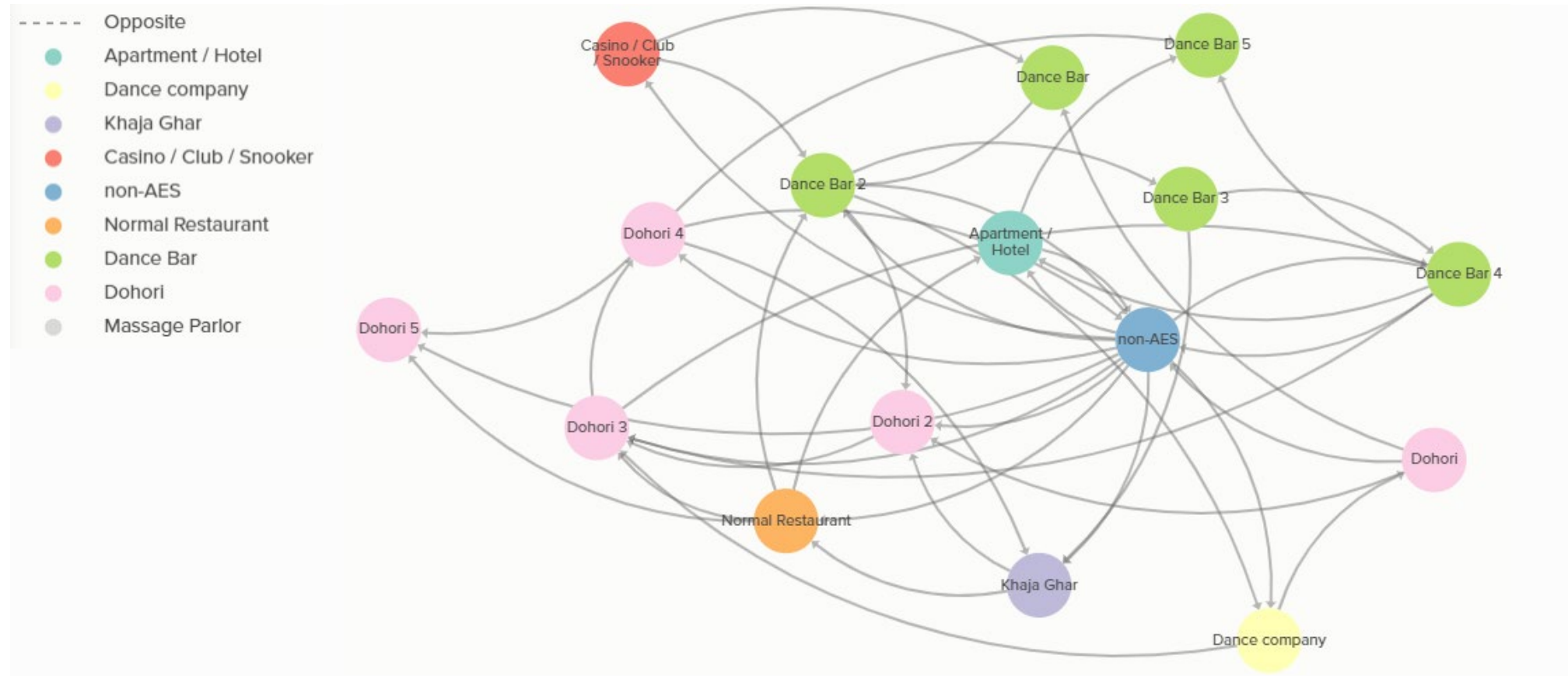
The third image, Figure 4.10, shows the trajectories and pathways for participants who were based in Dhangadi. As hospitality, entertainment, and wellness businesses are expanding across the country, the team thought this visualisation might show that workers in smaller communities have different labour trajectories than workers in Kathmandu. There are fewer pathways in this visualisation, but they continue to show a diverse web of movement between venues and jobs.

Figure 4.8 Labour trajectories for participants with at least two international jobs

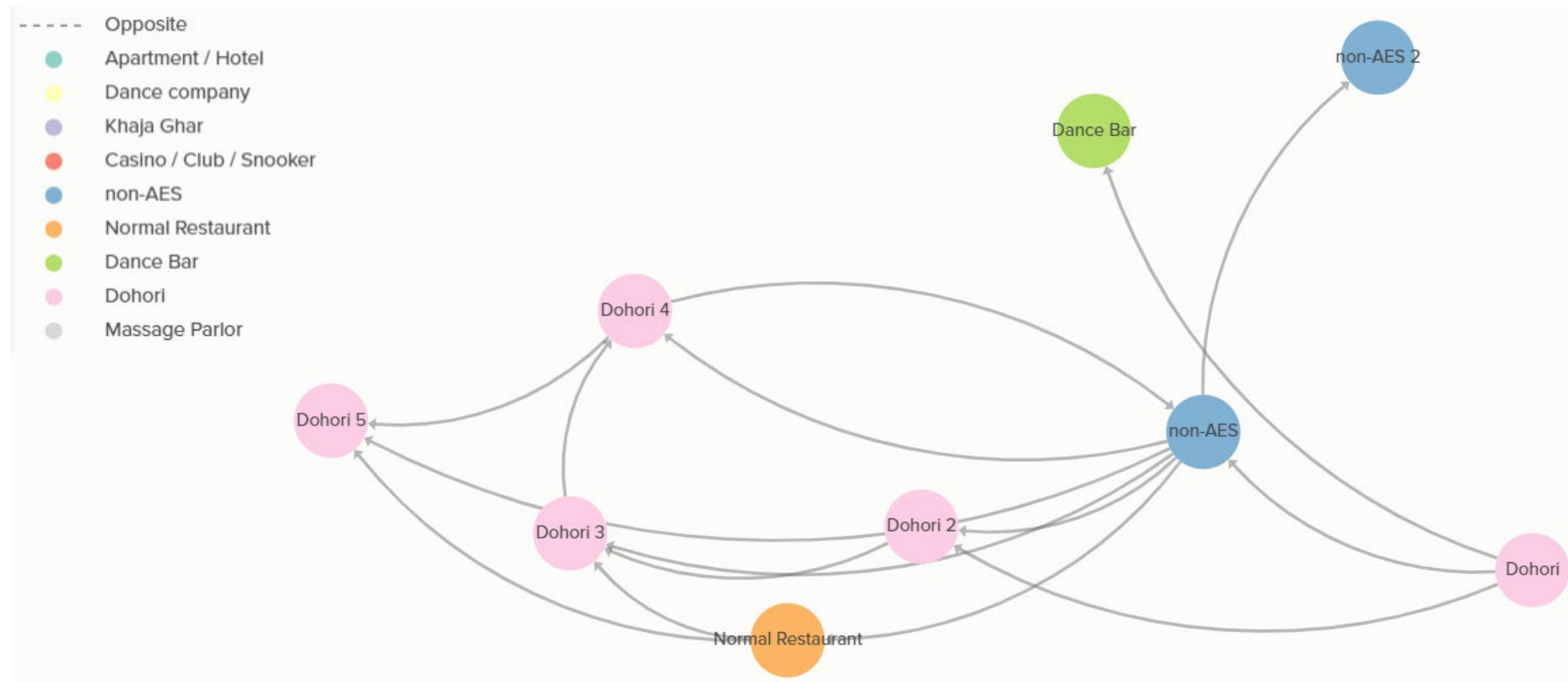


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Figure 4.9 Labour trajectories for participants who stayed in at least two jobs for less than one month



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Figure 4.10 Labour trajectories for participants based in Dhangadi

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Comparable visualisations were also created for groups of 10–12 workers with similar demographic characteristics:

1. Nepal 'AES' participants from Kathmandu who had completed secondary or post-secondary education and reported four or more jobs.
2. Participants who started working under 15 years old with three or more reported jobs.
3. Participants who identified as Dalit.

These visualisations look very similar to the three in this report and are not shown.

The visualisations demonstrate that workers move around a lot between:

- different job types, such as moving from 'AES' cleaner job to 'AES' waitress to international non-'AES' factory job;
- similar types of venues, such as moving from one dance bar to another dance bar;
- 'AES' venues, such as moving from a *dohori* to a dance bar;
- Nepal and 'IAES', such as moving from a *dohori* to a dance company and then back to a *dohori*; and,
- between 'AES' and non-'AES' venues, such as Nepali *dohori* and non-'AES' foreign labour migration.

Though most of the 240 jobs were as singers, dancers, or performers, the workers also participated in many other kinds of employment, both within and outside of the 'AES'. Moreover, as described earlier, the vast majority of jobs were found through informal labour intermediaries – family members, long-term friends, and recent acquaintances. Formal labour intermediaries (manpower agencies) were only used for foreign labour migration.

The different individual trajectories result in a dynamic web of venues, jobs, and labour intermediaries. The respondents reported great variation in the number and variety of jobs and venues, moving between 'AES' and non-'AES' jobs, and between jobs in Nepal and internationally. Participants used a mix of family members, friends they have known for a long time, and recent 'AES' acquaintances to help them get new jobs that they hoped would provide better pay and more stability.

No consistent patterns in the work trajectories based on participant characteristics or work history were found. Instead, labour trajectories of 'AES' workers appear to be more like a web – individual threads that connect and separate through the type of venue, type of job, location, and type of labour intermediary. There are no clear pathways or trajectories that lead into human trafficking and no clear strategic points for anti-trafficking interventions. Instead, the work histories of these 58 individual 'AES' workers highlight the informal, gendered labour market of Nepal, making a focus on the 'AES' as a single entity or specific 'hotspots' ineffective. The work histories of labour intermediaries, as reported in the companion paper (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022), demonstrate similar

webs where workers and LIs have overlapping roles. Both may have several jobs and sources of income at the same time. These webs provide opportunities but are not the cause of labour and sexual exploitation and human trafficking. As will be shown below, workers and labour intermediaries move in this dynamic web based on opportunities and constraints.

4.3 Research question 2: worker aspirations and hopes

This section focuses on the perceptions, hopes, and aspirations of workers in the 'AES', both in Nepal and internationally. It looks at their views of the 'AES', reasons for leaving jobs, their hopes and aspirations, perceptions of international work and foreign migration, and improvements they believe could help them within the 'AES'. Note again that this is a limited sample with participants who have mainly worked as singers, dancers, and performers in Kathmandu-based *dohoris*. The diversity of jobs and venues that participants in this sample have experienced provide a rich story of their perceptions, hopes, and aspirations.

Some participants had positive statements about the sector, finding that it was 'good', easy to find jobs, and that singing, dancing, and performing are 'easy'. Many participants pointed out that they work to pay the bills. Therefore, the jobs in the 'AES' serve their purpose – work in the 'AES' is an opportunity to earn money. With that money, they can do things that are important to them; for example, feed their families or relatives and support siblings in pursuing higher education. As an experienced female international singer, 26, replied to the question 'What is important in this sector?': 'Good pay and respect'; to the question 'Why do you like this sector?', she responded 'I have learned a lot from here; this work has helped me put food on the table.'

Several participants described specific aspects of working in the 'AES' environment that appealed to them. A number of participants mentioned that they liked working at night and for only a few hours each day. Several of the participants who had worked internationally mentioned that they were able to travel with short programmes. For some, getting their meals and transport covered meant they could save more money.

Here, we have to work just for four hours and rest of the time we have leisure time.

(Female waitress, 23)

I like 'AES'... In the afternoon, we are free and we can do whatever. The agriculture work is different, and you have to work all day.

(Female with international experience, farmer and dancer, 36)

Several participants referred specifically to the opportunities for work to show their talent, stating they enjoyed performing. In addition, over time the participants noted that they gained experience and had knowledge and skills to do this work.

What are the positive aspects of the AES?

One thing is we are able to show our talents here. We are able to look after our family. It also helps to develop our skills and talents.
(Female dancer with international experience, 33)

Why do you like this sector?

I wanted to become a singer from my childhood and this sector has provided me an opportunity to do that, so I like this sector.
(Female singer, 19)

A few participants, as well as participants in the feedback sessions, noted that they enjoy the work because it provides important stress relief.

What is the interesting part of this 'AES' that keeps you here?

It helps me to heal my anxiety and stress when I dance. I feel relief and free from tensions. I feel happy from the heart to do what I love.
(Female dancer, 28)

In order to get a better understanding of why workers continue to stay in 'AES', they were asked about their hopes and aspirations for the future, including their hopes for future employment. Many workers described aspirations that involved continued work in the 'AES'. Some workers wanted to continue to be singers, dancers, and performers and described hopes and plans to improve their skills and expand their audience, perhaps by cutting records, producing their own music, or receiving more publicity about their dance skills. In addition, some workers expressed interest in remaining in the 'AES' but with better pay or more respect from customers, employers, and the public.

What is your future plan?

To be a great singer.
(Female singer, 26)

Why are you doing this job?

My dream is to release an album as I love singing. Another is to support my family financially.
(Female singer, 22)

What are your future aspirations?

I would like to continue in AES but in places where the payment is better.
(Female, international non-'AES' cleaner and 'AES' waitress in Nepal, 34)

Some participants expressed more general hopes and aspirations, such as wishing to continue their education, including vocational training such as beauty parlour work. Many participants stated that they would like to 'earn more money' and some considered that foreign labour migration was the way to do this (see Section 4.3.1). Other participants expressed value-based goals such as supporting family or finding respected, dignified work. Finally, some participants expressed their hopes and aspirations in emotional terms by either seeking happiness or feeling so worried they were unable to describe any hopes about the future. Here are some typical comments from the interviews:

What you want to do in future?

I want to complete bachelor level. I have a desire to work in social organisations. I love singing and want to continue [in the] singing field. I also want to go abroad.

(Female singer, 22)

Do you have any future plans or not? In case you want to change your work sector, what would you like to change it to?

I would like to learn any type of skill related to beauty parlour and change my occupation in the near future.

(Female singer, 21)

What are your future aspirations?

I want to earn and make a house for my parents along with working as a model.

(Female waitress in Dhangadi, 19)

When asked what improvements could help the 'AES' sector, some participants mentioned concrete employment issues that are relevant to all workplaces. They wished to see salaries paid on time, with the pay that has been promised or agreed to by the employer and worker, and paid holiday. This could be enforced with contracts or employment letters.

Workers wished for no further exploitation and a secure and safe environment that included freedom of movement between workplaces and no abuse.

I want this sector to be more respected. I also wish that workplace slavery be abolished.

(Female singer, 19)

What do you expect to happen in this sector?

I really wish if it was safe, good payment, and also dignified.

(Female singer in Dhangadi, 30)

More generally, and perhaps most importantly, workers want respect – for themselves as humans, for their work as performers, waiters, and cleaners, and for their sector – providing entertainment, wellness, and hospitality. One participant summed this up as follows:

What would you like to see happen in this sector?

If this sector would be more respected, better paid, and safe.
(Female waitress, 22)

How do you want the 'AES' sector to be improved?

No humiliation, supportive owner, respectful.
(Female singer, 26)

These comments demonstrate that some workers wish for more formalisation, regulation, and enforcement of labour rights within the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors as they perceive that these rights will ensure safer workplaces, and a decent livelihood.

4.3.1 Aspirations and perceptions of international work and foreign migration

Some participants discussed their interest or their wish to work outside of Nepal, both in 'AES' and non-'AES' work. This is not surprising given that personal migration remittances provide an estimated 24 per cent of Nepal's gross domestic product (World Bank 2022). Workers expressed interest in working in the Gulf States, Malaysia, Europe, North America, and Australia. They all agreed that they could earn more money outside of Nepal as the wages are higher. They see this as new houses and opportunities arise around them from friends, family, and community members involved in foreign labour migration. No workers expressed any concerns about costs or debts associated with foreign labour migration. The team noted contrasting ideas about the safety of foreign 'AES' labour work. It may be that workers were expressing ideas based on what they imagined of the work, or what they heard from other co-workers or the male migrating customers in their 'AES' venues as well as labour intermediaries. For example:

What is the difference between national and international 'AES'?

I think the only thing different is the salary. The working conditions are similar. In abroad, the language is different which creates barrier. We do not feel safe. We can't go outside. We have to work whole night. But because the payment is good we want to go there.
(Female singer with international experience, 27)

While workers are interested in foreign labour migration for a higher income, many participants also stated that their ideal work location was near home and

family in Nepal. In other words, they preferred not to leave their families but felt that travel for work was the only way to earn a decent income.

Workers also perceive that being far from home can mean more freedom and also some protection from stigma. This finding was reinforced during our validation and feedback sessions. Workers who have had some international experience and have returned to Nepal said that foreign 'AES' work provided some protection because family, friends, and the community did not know the nature of their employment. A person who is harassed and exploited in a foreign country may feel that at least they will not be embarrassed in front of friends and family who do not know what occurred.

Why do you want to go to Dubai?

Because if I do any work here, people will say – oh, this girl is doing this and that. But if I go somewhere out of country, no one will see and say anything.

(Female cleaner in both 'AES' and non-'AES' venues, with international experience, 23)

In summary, workers flow in and out of job types and venues as opportunities in 'AES' and non-'AES' arise, using strategies based on their immediate needs and constraints and they migrate in the hope of safe, dignified work and decent income (EIDidi *et al.* 2022; Sheill *et al.* 2022). They see positive aspects of working in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sector, and hope that there will be specific improvements in that sector. In particular, many workers aspire to participate in foreign labour migration, which they perceive to bring higher salaries and less shame.

4.4 Cross-cutting: formal and informal labour economy

The hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors operate in the Nepali labour economy, which is a complicated and opaque system of formal and informal regulations, practices, and policies.

As described earlier, workers mainly rely on family members, long-term friends, and recent acquaintances from the 'AES' sector to help them find jobs. These informal labour intermediaries are trusted and relied upon to find work. Once in the new venues or jobs, workers reported many labour and employment challenges that are not unique to these sectors and exemplify the lack of regulation and enforcement. In particular, there were frequent reports of lack of job security, low pay, underpayment, or not receiving pay at the agreed time or in the agreed amounts. As a female singer in Dhangadi, 30, commented: 'The biggest challenge is that we don't get paid on time. It is difficult for us to manage money at the time of need.'

Participants reported that they work without contracts or appointment letters, and have no guarantees about job security, insurance, or receiving salaries and schedules as promised. One participant noted that artists and performers are

particularly vulnerable to a lack of regulation in their industry and employment opportunities. This can lead to obligations to work while sick or foregoing important family events. These are factors that should be the responsibility of the owners, but as a 26-year-old female singer with international experience noted, 'if the owners don't earn, they blame us'.

What are the challenges/problems in 'AES'?

No sick/leave system so if you take leave, your salary will be reduced. No insurance, no job guarantee, and no safety. Society doesn't take [work in this sector] positively. Owners don't take their responsibilities, and there are no appointment letters or ID card for the workers.

(Female singer, 37)

Also, while some 'AES' workers appreciated working in the evening and at night, other participants noted that this schedule is challenging as they are unable to sleep or work regular hours. Some found it difficult to find housing because they were leaving and returning late at night.

Other workplace challenges include conflicts with and harassment by co-workers, exposing their bodies, the risk of losing jobs based on their looks, and exposure to tobacco smoke. All of these conditions persist in informal labour environments with little regulation or enforcement of labour rights.

Participants who described a desire to work in non-'AES' jobs in Europe felt that this would be safe work, while workers who expected to do 'AES' work through informal labour migration, such as in India or with tourist visas in GCC countries, reported that there were greater work-related risks than staying in Nepal. They believed that there were greater risks, but they still wanted to go for the improved pay. The researchers believe this reflects the reliance on personal anecdotes and experience and may also reflect perceptions about formal labour migration through legal, regulated processes and informal foreign labour migration.

Participants recognise that their presence and participation as hosts, entertainment, and wellness workers are critical to the success of the sector for owners, workers, and customers. They have clear ideas about how to improve their working conditions and the sector as a whole. Many participants felt that 'better pay' or 'good payment' and supportive owners would improve their working conditions. They also mentioned a desire for regulation:

People say that if this sector was organised and regulation was there, it would be better. Dohori and hotel needs workers like us. If we got contract letter, it would be good.

(Female with international experience, farmer, and dancer, 36)

Such recommendations fit into broader suggestions for more oversight, formality, and structure, including more government regulation, strict rules, and contracts for foreign migration.

With very few exceptions, study participants did not consider the informal labour intermediaries, e.g. family members, friends, and recent acquaintances who referred and helped them get jobs, as responsible for subsequent workplace conditions. In other words, people who facilitate the informal system of finding and getting new jobs are not seen to be responsible for the quality or experience in the workplace. Thus, awareness and readiness interventions that focus on workers finding jobs through informal labour intermediaries may not increase workers' agency and ability to ensure safe workplaces, timely pay, and other labour rights in the workplace itself.

4.5 Cross-cutting: gendered labour constraints

Study participants had a lot to say about gendered labour constraints and challenges within the 'AES' in general, in the venues and the jobs themselves. The most common concerns centred around the customers at 'AES' venues and sexual harassment. In *dohori* and dance bars, workers are required to sit with the customers and encourage them to buy alcohol. Often, the workers are required to drink alcohol, or are strongly encouraged to do so because they receive commission on alcohol sales to top up their wages. They are pressured by the owners to call customers and encourage them to come to the venues and spend money on alcohol and food. Workers report frequent and ongoing harassment from customers who they describe as having 'bad intentions'. They experience verbal abuse and sexual harassment and fear being raped. Here are a few examples that were reported by participants.

What do you feel about the AES?

I don't feel good about 'AES'. I would love to work on my own rather than working in this sector. I don't like when owners ask us to sit with customers and also to drink with them. They [customers] touch [us] uncomfortably. They even use bad words.

(Female waitress, 19)

How was your work experience when you started working in the 'AES'?

It felt quite difficult at initial stage. I used to feel difficult/awkward in talking... We had to sit with guests and struggle with their bad touch. I didn't have experience of drinking (except jaad) but I had to drink (as per the customer's demand or request) in the work. Later on, I was habituated with all these things... sometimes a bad customer tries to convince us to stay for a night and says that they will pay even one lakh for one night.

(Female dancer, 19)

What can be the challenges in this work?

Have to tolerate physical touch of customers.

(Female waitress in Dhangadi, 20)

As discussed in the companion paper about labour intermediaries (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022), labour intermediaries can also perpetuate these constraints. Our interviews with labour intermediaries found some patronising attitudes, such as expecting workers to be professional dancers while complaining when they want to charge for their skills.

These gender-based challenges extend from the workplace into the community. Participants reported harassment from the police, particularly when they were coming home late from work at night, or as one 37-year-old female casino worker with international experience described, 'the torture of police while going home at night'. Moreover, one masseuse, 32, specifically mentioned police harassment in the workplace itself: 'sometimes police arrest us from the [spa] workplace with no reason.' This harassment by the police is accepted within a broader society that stigmatises this sector and its female workers, as this participant explained:

The challenges that I mostly faced was differentiation between male artist and female artist. I also found different perspectives on male artists and female artists where female artists are measured negatively by the people. There are huge bad attitudes towards females in 'AES'. People think we are not good girls.

(Female singer with international experience, 35)

Stigma, and particularly gendered stigma, was a frequent concern of study participants. Participants felt that society views this work as 'undignified' and that they are viewed as 'objects' not people.

My recent job gives me insecurities thinking that people of my community might not accept, or I might get humiliated although this job is not that humiliating. If this was set in the hospital, they might think other way like it's a need. We need oil massage from birth to old age and this not a bad job but when community look into this job, I fear of being humiliated by them.

(Masseuse, 32)

Some participants stated that they hide their jobs from their partners, parents, family members, and the broader community. A 21-year-old female dancer stated, '...at home I have told them that I work at a shop. And when my brother asked me where do I work at night, I told them that I work at hospital.' Other participants stated that their partner and family were aware that they work in *dohori* or dance bars and have reluctantly accepted that they have these jobs in these venues as they understand more about the working conditions and appreciate the income it generates.

How did your parents respond to the work?

At first, I got shouted at for working late but later I convinced my mum that whatever I was doing wasn't a bad job and I used to show her the videos of my work and whenever I got tips, I used to share them with her so later on, they became more supportive and less worried about my job.

(Female with international experience, farmer and dancer, 36)

The term 'humiliation' was used frequently, and often referred to the way that workers are treated by customers. Participants stated that they are seen as sex workers and are teased, shamed, and humiliated by the male customers who come to be entertained by them.

More broadly, 'AES' workers perceive that society in general is disrespectful of them and their work in this sector. Many participants commented that they are perceived poorly and receive no respect.

How did you find the work in 'AES'?

I liked to sing songs. Society doesn't look at you with a good view and everyone thinks of us as sex workers and treat[s] us with disrespect.

(Female singer in Dhangadi, 23)

Poor treatment and disrespect by owners and labour intermediaries perpetuate and exacerbate the struggles for female workers in this sector. These constraints are reinforced by the social and economic context, and policy regulations on social support, employment, and migration.

4.6 Cross-cutting: trafficking and exploitation

As previously described, this research was not focused on trafficking or exploitation, and experience as a survivor was not a criteria for participation in this study. The researchers recognise the positionality of the participants with the CSOs who were involved in study recruitment and the researchers. More importantly, they acknowledge the complex relationships between workers and the family members, friends, and recent acquaintances who acted as informal labour intermediaries that is also discussed in detail in the companion paper (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022). Participants were not asked to describe experiences of trafficking or exploitation, and therefore no statistics or prevalence estimates are provided (ILO, Walk Free and IOM 2022) for trafficking or modern slavery in the 'AES' through this study.

For each job described in the work trajectory, participants were asked two questions:

- Did you take this job by your own will?
- Were you forced/put under pressure to do this job by anyone else?

Participants reported that they took 98 per cent of the jobs by their own will and were not obligated to do so by someone else. It is important to note that the terms 'will' and 'choice' imply a level of economic and social freedom for people to make independent decisions. For many jobs, participants stated that while they were not forced by anyone else to take the role, they felt an obligation or 'compulsion' to take it because of their immediate need to earn money and the lack of other alternatives available to them under the constraints of being female in the labour economy. As stated in Section 4.4, workers do not see the person who helped them get a job as responsible for the working conditions. At the same time, the relationships, family and household economics, and gendered social relationships may make refusal to accept a so-called 'offer of help' getting a job inconceivable.

Was working in this field your own decision or were you obligated [compulsion]?

Both self-decision and compulsion; compulsion in a sense for the livelihood.

(Female singer, 38)

Did you change your jobs out of your own will or obligation?

None of [the job changes] were out of my self-willingness. It was pure obligatory because of my family financial condition, as parents were not earning much. The main reason [for discomfort] was because I had to work the late night shift and I was the only girl to go to [removed for confidentiality] that I deemed to be rather unsafe and I was scared.

(Female bartender and DJ, 20)

Several participants specifically mentioned risks of human trafficking and modern slavery. One participant stated:

I haven't been in that situation ma'am. I won't lie to you as I've already shared so much with you. As I have been able to be aware, I haven't been in that situation but if other people like me aren't able to grasp the situation in a more professional and aware way, they will get into slavery and sexual assault.

(Female hostess, 29)

Only five of the 240 jobs described by the 58 workers in this study were reported to have been forced on the participants. Investigating whether these cases fit the UN definition (UN 2000) of human trafficking was beyond the scope of this research study.¹¹ In a few cases, participants requested and received legal support as well as psychosocial support stemming from their workplace abuse; the researchers did not investigate any claims directly against the legal definitions.

¹¹ See definitions section at the beginning of this paper.

Here are four examples of probable trafficking that were reported by participants.

- In Dhangadi, a situation was identified where 'Shoba', 'Akriti', and 'Kalpana'¹² were being kept as hostages. The researchers held meetings with government agencies (the mayor, chief district officer, police, and others) to discuss general 'AES' worker issues and the specific case. Eventually, the three workers were rescued with the help of Nepal Police. A case was filed with the police, and the perpetrator was required to pay compensation and the withheld wages to the workers and sent to jail for 15 days. Later, the workers returned to their jobs after receiving the money. Researchers were harassed after rumours spread about the incident.
- 'Meena' began working as a domestic labourer when she was nine years old. Her parents were dead, and her grandfather sent her to Kathmandu to stay with an aunt who promised to take care of her and send her to school. Instead, 'Meena' was sent to work as a child domestic labourer, and the aunt collected her salary and lied to the grandfather. The participant worked there for four years before finally returning to her village.
- 'Ritu' reported that a labour intermediary took her to a place promising to help her get a job but then allegedly kept her in confinement and tried to rape her. He was caught by staff from the hotel, but the hotel owner refused to let her go to the police as the labour intermediary was a friend of the owner.
- 'Priyanka' was recruited along with four other dancers by a labour intermediary (another 'AES' dancer) to take jobs in Kolkata. They were promised money but were not paid, were forced to stay in the location, and were told by the owner of the venue that they had been 'bought' by him. With the help of one of the customers, they were able to escape and return to Nepal. When 'Priyanka' threatened to press charges against the labour intermediary the blame was shifted, and she was told that the owner of the Kolkata venue paid the labour intermediary for bringing the workers.

These examples are typical of experiences reported by 'AES' workers and the CSOs that support them. It is important to recognise that there is variation in the actions and means in these four cases, though they all have the same purpose of trafficking and exploitation. Moreover, these cases do not indicate involvement of organised crime syndicates, but have happened in the context of lax systematic economic and regulatory enforcement. People who are developing and implementing interventions to prevent human trafficking, labour, and sex exploitation in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors need to recognise these conditions of lax systematic economic and regulatory enforcement to ensure effective interventions.

Our findings contribute to the increasing number of critical reports about the collateral and gendered damage of human trafficking eradication efforts among workers and citizens (Bhagat 2022; Ghosh 2015). This research study, along with the companion paper on labour intermediaries (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022), demonstrates the need to ensure policies and interventions that support women and girls for safe decent work are based on evidence not outdated assumptions.

¹² Fictionalised names.

4.7 Cross-cutting: vulnerabilities and resilience to labour and sexual exploitation

This research study focused on the labour trajectories and ways that workers in the 'AES' are employed and move through jobs. While this study did not find patterns in labour trajectories – including jobs, venues, or use of informal labour intermediaries – based on specific vulnerability characteristics, all of the participants identified vulnerabilities that affected their risks for exploitation, including trafficking. These vulnerabilities can be categorised in the ecosystem framework for vulnerability risk and resilience (see Section 1.3.2). Many of the factors noted in earlier discussions related to first jobs and gendered experiences both positive and negative in 'AES' jobs and venues.

At the individual level, the 57 female and one transgender male participant experienced:

- Lack of education or low education due to leaving school early;
- Early age at marriage;
- Early age at first birth;
- Poor physical or mental health;
- Sexual exploitation, rape, or abduction as child, adolescent, and adult;
- Substance use or abuse, either forced or voluntary.

Participants described many vulnerability factors in their birth family household. These included:

- Sick, dead, or divorced parents, many siblings, or poverty in birth family;
- Required to work as a child either in the home or alongside family members in agriculture or other labour;
- Need to provide financial support for parents or siblings, including educational or migration expenses of siblings and exploitation;
- Domestic violence, child abuse, or not getting along with parents;
- Leaving home or possibly running away;
- Forced labour or trafficking by step-parent or other relative.

The adult household of the participant can also have characteristics that increase vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking, such as:

- Early marriage and forced marriage;
- Poor relationships with partners or spouses; partners who abandon participants or have second marriages or affairs;
- Domestic violence towards participant or their children;
- Going through pregnancy and caring for babies and children with no paternal support.

Community-level vulnerability factors reported by participants included early age of working outside the home; inability to pay for health care or receive services and support required; financial insecurity; promises by unscrupulous people of good jobs; police harassment without cause, and trafficking.

There were also labour-market conditions that increased vulnerability for 'AES' workers, such as low pay or underpayment; no written contract or employment agreement. Owners and managers may give part of the agreed wage, promising to give more the following month and to provide full payment in the future, so that workers stay in an exploitative environment.

Finally, 'AES' workers experience structural conditions that exacerbate these other vulnerability factors, such as:

- Substance use and abuse, especially alcohol use by customers;
- Gendered inequalities in educational opportunities;
- Gendered inequalities in legal opportunities for employment, particularly foreign migration;
- Gendered inequalities in pay and earnings for the same work;
- Stigma/bias against performance work / artistic employment;
- Stigma/bias against 'AES' work and workers;
- High costs of living;
- Lack of available adequate housing;
- No social security/insurance safety net;
- Difficulties in filing cases and prosecuting alleged perpetrators of abuse; and,
- Lack of accountability in formal and informal economy and employment policies and regulations.

While this list of factors is both extensive and unsurprising, it is also important to recognise the resilience inherent in the work histories, hopes, and aspirations reported by the 'AES' workers in this study. Workers continuously demonstrated creativity and agency to persevere in the face of common hardships. Though some participants had to start working at a young age or because of household and domestic hardships (see Section 4.2.4), other participants pursued jobs in the 'AES' in order to achieve personal goals.

The depth and breadth of these many factors reinforce the vulnerability issues described earlier regarding risk and resilience, sociocultural context, choice and autonomy, and the complex constellations that are different for every individual. It is clear that 'AES' working conditions are challenging. At the same time, workers described their labour trajectories with insight and a keen perception of the trade-offs inherent in the Nepali labour market. The policies and practices to address these varied vulnerability factors for 'AES' workers must take the broader Nepali and international economic, political, and social context into account and recognise that each individual will be affected differently.

4.8 Cross-cutting: creative industry

As described above, *dohori* performers and dancers enjoy the opportunity to share their artistic expression in a growing range of venues that serve migrants, tourists, and young residents in 'AES hotspots'. They are part of an underfunded creative industry that is emerging and often misunderstood.

Ambivalent Nepali attitudes towards performers, especially *dohori* performers are not new. *Dohori* is appreciated as a national art form, with its intimate songs about courtship, romantic love, and sexual relationships. But work at night, especially by women performers, is also seen as a form of social transgression (Stirr 2017). Alcohol consumption by women is also contested. The stigma against female *dohori* performers, who are a significant group within the 'AES' sector, is thus a combination of work at night, their association with alcohol consumption, and an art form with subversive improvisations on traditional courtship narratives.

The entertainment provided by *dohori* performers in these 'hotspots', dominated by small to medium-sized businesses, is firmly located within what Appadurai (1996) calls 'globally defined fields of possibility'. These are places where people come to realise globally defined aspirations, whether to work abroad, climb Mount Everest, get famous, or find true love. Skilled entertainers are able to improvise a song for every client on the spot. They talk about 'coming home in a coffin' to voice the fear of a first-time labour immigrant to the Gulf and about the hope to 'become rich, fall in love, and marry'.

As there is no system that guides the rates for performing artists in Nepal, it is unclear how performers, traditional or modern, can set or enforce fair prices and other aspects of decent work. Terms such as 'AES' are unlikely to improve the respect or working conditions for *dohori* singers and other performers.

5. Conclusion

This research study set out to investigate the labour trajectories of workers and labour intermediaries for the Nepali 'Adult Entertainment Sector' in order to determine strategic points and opportunities to end labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. The two studies – this one and the companion paper (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022) – with one combined research methodology, show a complex and complicated ecosystem where global political, social, and economic factors affect individual lives of performers and other workers in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors within a constrained environment.

The use of vague terms by researchers, policymakers, and donors involved in anti-trafficking efforts such as 'AES', and 'AES hotspot' is confusing. Both the assumption of a single economic sector and the conception of a geographic location that is exclusive to these businesses and their workers is stigmatising. It also distracts from the available and emerging research on migration infrastructures, labour dynamics, and the complicated relationships between highly diverse workers and labour intermediaries (Shrestha and Yeoh 2018; Kook 2018). The team hopes that this research helps to 'open the black box of brokerage' (Axelsson *et al.* 2022).

Nepali and foreign labour employers rely on informal labour intermediaries to find workers. Although workers do not receive job security assurances such as employment contracts, they also do not view these informal labour intermediaries as responsible for their working conditions. Policies and regulations intended to prevent trafficking through labour intermediaries do not match these realities.

Our findings show that there are multiple and diverse labour trajectories for 'AES' workers in Nepal and for international work. Incorrect perceptions of how workers find, keep, and change jobs have perpetuated anti-trafficking policies and interventions focused on 'AES hotspots' and unscrupulous organised labour intermediaries that do not mirror reality. Labour trajectories of 'AES' workers appear to be more like a web – individual threads that connect and separate through the type of venue, type of job, location, and type of labour intermediary.

There are reports of labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking in worker and labour intermediary labour trajectories and experiences. Workers reported taking most jobs of their own accord, rather than being forced by labour intermediaries, but exploitation is widespread. Human trafficking is not reported as frequently. Human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and labour exploitation in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors both in Nepal and internationally is due to systematic economic and regulatory conditions and lack of enforcement rather than organised crime networks.

Women experience and report gendered constraints and stigma in the 'AES' sectors, and the constraints are reinforced by the socioeconomic context and policy regulations on social support, employment, and migration. The most common concerns centre around the customers at 'AES' venues and sexual harassment, when workers are required to sit with the customers and encourage

them to buy alcohol. These concerns extend into the community with stigma – and especially gendered stigma – experienced by many workers.

Vulnerabilities for women and girls combine potential risks and resilience at individual, household, community, and societal levels. The life histories and work trajectories were characterised by examples of increased risks as well as opportunities for resilience. Workers continuously demonstrated creativity and agency to persist in the face of common hardships. They described their labour trajectories with insight and a keen perception of the trade-offs inherent in the Nepali labour market. The policies and practices to address these varied vulnerability factors for 'AES' workers must take the broader Nepali and international economic, political, and social context into account and recognise that each individual will be affected differently.

There are no clear pathways or trajectories that lead into human trafficking and no clear strategic points for anti-trafficking interventions. Instead, the work histories of these 58 individual 'AES' workers highlight the informal, gendered labour market of Nepal, making a focus on the 'Adult Entertainment Sector' as a single entity or specific 'hotspots' ineffective. The work histories of labour intermediaries, as reported in *Getting Work: The Role of Labour Intermediaries for Workers in Nepal and the International 'Adult Entertainment Sector'* (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2022), demonstrate similar webs where workers and labour intermediaries have overlapping roles. Both may have several jobs and sources of income at the same time. These webs provide opportunities but are not the cause of labour and sexual exploitation, and human trafficking.

'AES' workers have important and clearly defined dreams and aspirations. They hope to earn money to take care of their families, start and own their own businesses, or continue to work as professional performers. There is wide variation between worker backgrounds and experience, but all are united in the desire to make a decent living in a safe, dignified environment. In order to improve their work environment, 'AES' workers wish to see salaries paid on time, with the pay that has been promised or agreed to by the employer, no further exploitation, a secure and safe environment that includes freedom of movement between workplaces, and no abuse. Mainly, workers want respect for themselves as humans, for their work as performers, waiters, and cleaners, and for their sector – providing entertainment, wellness, and hospitality.

Finally, *dohori* performers and dancers enjoy the opportunity to share their artistic expression in a growing range of venues that serve migrants, tourists, and young residents in 'AES hotspots'. They are part of an underfunded creative industry that is emerging and often misunderstood. The creative industry is a vital part of society and Nepal's economic growth, including the tourism sector.

In sum, this research demonstrates the need to ensure that policies and interventions to end human trafficking and support women and girls to find safe, decent work are based on evidence of the complexity of the businesses and workers that make up the Nepali hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors.

6. Recommendations

1. Acknowledge that *dohori* entertainment is part of a diverse Nepali creative industry. Encourage investment to strengthen the creative industry to cater to different tastes and purses, and the inclusive development of talent of all genders and backgrounds.
2. Business leaders (owners, group leaders, managers) should have the responsibility and the authority to set boundaries and accountability for customers, such as codes of conduct or house rules focused on harm reduction, rather than outlawing alcohol sales and consumption. They could exclude drunk people from entering an establishment, prevent the sale of alcohol to intoxicated people, and ban commission on alcohol sales. These measures can be strengthened by linking with public health (traffic safety, work safety).
3. Ensure that workers, labour intermediaries, and owners know their rights and have access to appropriate guidance for minimum and maximum rates, working hours, and social protection systems that suit sectors with many small and family-owned enterprises. Moreover, given the current conflicting interests, gendered biases, and labour and wage inequalities guidance would best be checked, developed, and revised with stakeholders of all genders.
4. Support workers in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors by ensuring safe, decent workplaces and employment processes.
5. Avoid confusing terms and concepts of 'Adult Entertainment Sector' and 'hotspot' in policies, regulations, and interventions to end trafficking.
6. End anti-trafficking policies and interventions that restrict women's mobility for work and create a demand for rogue services by labour intermediaries that avoid the law.
7. Trafficking-related interventions in the hospitality, entertainment, and wellness sectors should be part of labour market reforms that support decent work and mobility for everyone working in those sectors.
8. Check that sociocultural norms on gender, labour, and sexuality are taken into consideration in anti-trafficking research, policy, and activism.

Annexe 1: Types of venues identified in this study

Types of venues identified by workers, listed alphabetically.

Type of establishment	Count	Frequency	AES	Non-AES	Nepal	International
Canteen	2	1%		2	2	
Cleaning Company	4	2%		4		4
Construction	7	3%		7	7	
Dance Bar	52	22%	52		44	8
<i>Dohori</i>	106	44%	106		101	5
Electrical Company	1	0%		1		1
Factory	5	2%		5	4	1
Farming	2	1%		2	2	
Insurance Company	1	0%		1	1	
Massage Parlor	1	0%	1		1	
NGO	1	0%		1	1	
No fixed establishment	2	1%		2	2	
Normal Restaurant	9	4%	9		6	3
Online Sales	1	0%		1	1	
Private Residence	12	5%		12	11	1
Retail Store	2	1%		2	2	
Tea Estate	1	0%		1	1	
Cabin Restaurant / <i>khajaghar</i> / <i>bhatti pasal</i>	7	3%	7		7	
Casino/Club, Snooker or Pool House	5	2%	5		2	3
Dance Company / Institution / APF	11	5%	11		4	7
Hotel / Guest House / Apartment	8	3%	8		8	
Grand Total	240	100%	199	41	207	33

Annexe 2: Types of jobs identified in this study

Type of job titles reported by workers, listed alphabetically.

Type of job	Count	Frequency	AES	Non-AES	Nepal	International
Bartender	1	0%	1		1	
Casino Worker	2	1%	2		2	
Child Care	1	0%		1	1	
Cleaner	16	7%	8	8	12	4
DJ	2	1%	2		2	
Electrician	1	0%		1		1
Factory Worker	2	1%		2	1	1
Farmer	1	0%		1	1	
Garment Factory Worker	2	1%		2	2	
General Food Worker	2	1%	1	1	2	
Host/Hostess	10	4%	10		9	1
Household Worker	10	4%		10	9	1
Insurance Company Worker	1	0%		1	1	
Labour	8	3%		8	8	
Massager	1	0%	1		1	
Retail Business Owner	1	0%		1	1	
Retail Sales	2	1%		2	2	
Self-Employed Selling Sweets	1	0%		1	1	
Selling Firewood	1	0%		1	1	
Sex Worker	2	1%	2		2	
Singer, Dancer, Performer	123	51%	123		102	21
Tea Picker	1	0%		1	1	
Waiter/Waitress	48	20%	48		44	4
Khajaghar Owner	1	0%	1		1	
Grand Total	240	100%	199	41	207	33

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