Experiences of separated children in Nepal

Susan Kay-Flowers, Pradipta Kadambari and Nalini Lama

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Introduction

This report reports the findings of an international, collaborative study that researched the experiences of separated children in Nepal through a series of interviews with practitioners who worked with this group. The practitioners worked in a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and child welfare agencies in Kathmandu.

This subject was chosen because of the growing awareness of increasing numbers of children experiencing parental separation in Nepal, but little being known about the phenomenon. The research study aimed to address this gap by researching practitioners' views of the experiences of separated children in Kathmandu to gain insight into the extent of the issue, understand the nature of children's experiences and identify any strategies or ways of working that were effective in working with these children. The research objectives were to:

1. Identify the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents

2. Understand children's experiences of separation from their parents from the perspective of practitioners working with them

3. Identify any strategies, interventions or ways of working used by practitioners to support these children

The study was undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of researchers from the School of Education in Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), England, UK and the Social Work Department, Kadambari Memorial College (KMC), Kathmandu, Nepal. Dr Susan Kay-Flowers, Senior Lecturer at LJMU was the Principal Investigator (PI) who worked with Co-researchers, Ms Pradipta Kadambari, Principal and Dr Nalini Lama, Research Coordinator at KMC. The team was assisted by four Social Work Interns from KMC. Findings from this qualitative research study are reported in this report and will be disseminated at an international webinar on 'Experiences of separated children in Nepal' to be held on 28 and 29 November 2022.

The report is organised into six sections. It starts with this brief introduction before going on to review the academic literature, outlining what is already known about separated children's experiences in Nepal. In seeking to establish the incidence of separated children in Nepal, the reasons for this and their experiences, in terms of their education, engagement in child labour, trafficking and issues related to lack of identity papers, the context for the study is set.

The third section explains the research design and the methods used in the study. It describes how the data was collected and the process of thematic analysis of the data. Consideration is also given to ethical issues relating to the study.

The fourth section reports the research findings using the key themes emerging from analysis of the data as headings. These are: reasons why children are separated from their parents; separated children's experiences after leaving home; the difficulties separated children face; issues relating to birth registration and citizenship certification; good practice and government responses.

The findings are discussed in the fifth section where the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents are examined and their experiences understood. Ways of working with these children as well as government responses are considered in an attempt to establish what can be done to support separated children in Nepal.

The final section of the report is the conclusion, in which key themes from the study are summarised and two particular areas of work identified – birth and citizenship registration and educating rural communities about children moving to Kathmandu for work. Suggestions are made about how the government might support practitioners' work in these areas with the recommendation that further research giving voice to separated children's experiences and exploring ways of promoting their educational and emotional well-being is undertaken.

What is known about separated children's experiences in Nepal?

This section of the report draws on existing research to examine what is known about separated children's experiences in Nepal. It starts by examining the extent of the issue and what is known about children's family situations. Drawing on Jennings' work (2014; 2016; 2017) it looks at marriage, separation and divorce in Nepal before going on to consider the impact of migration (internal and international). It then goes on to examine separated children's experiences after leaving home, paying particular attention to their education, child labour, trafficking and the impact of the lack of identity papers.

The extent of separated children

There is an increasing trend for children in Nepal not to live with both parents. In Guragain et al's study (2015) the percentage among children whose both parents were alive, increased from 22% in 2006 to 27% in 2011. Most lived with their mother, a very small minority lived with their father; the latter increased from 0.9% of children to almost 1.5% during this time (Guragain et al, 2015).

About 7% of children whose parents were alive, lived separately from both parents. Of these about a third (34%) lived with grandparents, a third (32%) with other relatives, 12% in in-law headed households because of child marriage, 9% in sibling headed households, 7% in unrelated family households and 2% were adopted or fostered (although this may be under-reported because adoption is uncommon in Nepal) (Guragain et al, 2015). In some cases, this was to access better educational facilities, to improve their academic performance and achievement (institutional care was excluded) (Guragain et al, 2015).

In these surveys about 5% of children were orphans. The number of paternal orphans (father had died and mother was living) was almost double the number of maternal orphans (mother had died and father was living) and about 3 in 1,000 children were double orphans (both parents had died) (Guragain et al, 2015). Orphans were more likely to live in households with unrelated or no adults and as such, faced particular challenges such as, economic crises, inadequate access to services and possible abuse by adults (Guragain et al, 2015).

A more recent study used the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (Nepal's first nationwide household survey in 2014), to identify children living away from both parents (Kamei, 2018). Described as 'independent children', they accounted for 4.8% of the sample; of whom 75% said their parents were alive, 50% said both parents were residing in other households in Nepal, 23% said one of their parents was abroad and 27% said they were somewhere else in Nepal (Kamei, 2018). Most lived with grandparents (53%), other relatives, (15%), siblings (12%) or with aunts and uncles (12%) (Kamei, 2018).

Marriage, separation and divorce

Marriage in Nepal tends to be universal and occurs at an early age, childbearing also tends to be universal and takes place within marriage. Historically marriages have been arranged by parents and/or other relatives although this practice is changing among young people, with many participating in their choice of marriage partner (Jennings, 2016).

While religiously and ethnically diverse, most Nepalese people identify as Hindu and 'under Hindu decree, after a marriage occurs, it is bound for life' (Jennings, 2016, p1353). Ethnicity plays an important role in marriage practices and expectations with those of high standing (Brahmins and Chhetris) adhering more strongly to Hindu customs and exerting stricter expectations particularly in relation to their daughters and arranged marriage (Jennings, 2017).

Divorce is rare although increasing opportunity to exercise choice in selecting a marriage partner, combined with changes to divorce laws which mean women can now retain 'custody of their children as long as they do not remarry' may mean divorce is becoming less stigmatised and couples may feel less pressure to remain in unhappy marriages (Jennings, 2016, p.230; 2017). While numbers remain low, a growing number of people are filing for divorce, with 921 divorce applications put before Chitwan District Court between 2000 and 2009, 99.6% of which were filed by women (Jennings, 2016). Couples marrying in the 1980s showed a faster rate of marital dissolution than those marrying in earlier decades. Infertility and severe domestic violence are seen as 'acceptable' reasons for marriage dissolution as well as polygamy, a practice which, although outlawed in 1963, has taken some time to change in rural areas, meaning in some cases a husband remarries without dissolving his first marriage (an option not available to women) (Jennings, 2016; 2017).

Marital breakdown does not always involve divorce, in many cases couples separate informally. Separations can last indefinitely and are recognised as a form of dissolution by local people. This can be a more desirable option than divorce for women because it allows for 'continued support from her husband and his family', as well as allowing the possibility of a reunion (Jennings 2016, p1353). Where parents separate or divorce, or parents die, children's living situations are 'determined by the local culture, decision of immediate parent, recommendations from relatives and well-wishers' with 'decisions based on traditions, beliefs, plan and practice' (Guragain et al, 2015, p.85)

Jennings (2014; 2016; 2017) found marital discord, age at the time of marriage, having some choice in selection of the marriage partner, the amount of time married, the presence of

children and whether a wife worked were associated with the risk of marital dissolution (separation and/or divorce) in rural Nepal.

Marital discord was strongly associated with increased rates of marital dissolution (Jennings, 2014). Women who married at an older age and chose their spouse in conjunction with their parents had reduced risk of marital dissolution. Being married for a long time was associated with a reduced risk of marital dissolution, as was the presence of children (Jennings, 2016). Wives' employment outside the home was associated with an increased risk of marital dissolution, with those in salaried positions maybe feeling more confident in supporting themselves than those working in seasonal waged labour (Jennings, 2016).

Migration in Nepal

Nepal experienced a significant rise in the rate of external migration in from 2008 to 2018 with over 4 million workers approved for foreign employment (MOLESS, 2020; ILO, 2021, p1). Over the last decade annual numbers have reduced due to economic and geopolitical factors, nonetheless over 350,000 approvals were issued in 2017/18 and over 230,000 in 2018/19 (MOLESS, 2020). These figures do not take account of migration to India, which has an open border with Nepal.

Most migrant workers are male and aged 25-35, over half are employed in low skilled work, often on temporary contracts; females account for about 5% of migrant workers (MOLESS, 2020). The volume of remittances received in Nepal was 8.79 billion US$ in 2018/19, which accounted for 28% of GDP, placing it fifth in World Bank rankings of countries receiving the highest remittance by share of GDP (MOLESS, 2020). On average one in three Nepalese households received remittances (ILO, 2021), this increased to two in three families in the Terai region and one in two in the Hilly and Mountain regions (MOLESS, 2020).

Migration takes many forms, it may be within Nepal (internal) or involve leaving the country (external), it may be permanent, long term, temporary or circular, with migrants moving between home and their work site on a seasonal or short term basis (Khan, 2021). Children's experience of migration varies as a result. For some, it involves living with one parent, the other having migrated; for others it involves living with family members, both parents having migrated, or becoming a 'separated child'. Others may migrate with their families but face separation due to the exploitative labour conditions at their destination, known as 'secondary migrants', these children are vulnerable as a consequence of their parents' circumstances (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p 400).

In some cases, children are 'left behind' to perform agricultural labour and/or domestic duties in the family home, on the family land or on rented plots. A 'lack of connection, nurture and

influence from parents' was found to be one of the main detriments to being left behind by family members (Daly et al, 2020, p 6).

Separated children's experiences

Drawing on key themes emerging from a review of the literature, this section examines separated children's experiences in Nepal. It describes their experiences of education, child labour, being trafficked and issues relating to difficulties associated with lack of identity papers.

To understand children's experiences, the way in which childhood is constructed in Nepal needs to be recognised. Nepalese children accept their role in contributing to the household's economy; some contribute through agricultural labour or domestic work in the family home, others migrate seasonally with their family and support their work there, while others move to the city as independent workers (Daly et al, 2020).

Extreme poverty and the rurality of Nepal - with a lack of employment in villages and limited educational opportunities - act as key drivers in the migration of children to cities and outside the country (Adhikari and Turton, 2020). 83% of the population of 30 million people live in rural areas. Widespread child labour, internal conflict and natural disasters, such as the earthquake of 2016, led to family separation and disruption to protective structures, exposing children to vulnerable conditions (Adhikari and Turton, 2020).

Many children move to the cities to secure employment or access better education opportunities, this proves a risky business for some, who enticed by false promises find they are forced to work in hazardous forms of labour (Kamei, 2018) or are trafficked into the sex trade (Simkhada, 2008). Under the UN Trafficking Protocol (2000) these children are deemed to have been trafficked, whether or not they have been deceived or 'consented', the issue of 'consent' being irrelevant for children under 18 under the Protocol (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p395).

To understand trafficking in the broader context of children's right to protection, Adhikari and Turton (2020) identified the individual and structural vulnerabilities children face. They classified individual vulnerabilities as including gender, ethnicity and caste and structural vulnerabilities as work, migration, education and child protection issues, attempting to understand how these vulnerabilities intersect in opening up opportunities for traffickers. This approach has merit when examining the situation of other groups of separated children, therefore individual and structural vulnerabilities are used to frame understanding of children's situations in the following section.

Education

Some children showed a strong sense of agency in their decision to migrate to a boarding school in Kathmandu, highlighting the lack of educational opportunities in rural areas and need to migrate to move forward in life (structural vulnerability) (Khan, 2021). For others, decisions were made by their parents, often for educational reasons but in some cases to avoid their child's recruitment as a child soldier during the Maoist Revolution (individual vulnerability) (Khan, 2021).

Difficulties in travelling around the country and economic poverty meant children living in the boarding school made very few return visits to their village, most visiting only once, sometimes never during 6-12 years of separation (Khan, 2021). The purpose of such visits was to engage in work to offset the costs of their studies and to overcome issues relating to identity papers. This meant over time children could experience 'extremely sporadic correspondence', which took an emotional toll on family members and children alike with feelings of 'worry, disconnection, depression, loneliness and loss' as well as sometimes feelings of resentment, abandonment and 'emotional ambivalence towards what used to be "home", raising questions about their personal sense of identity (Khan, 2021, p13).

Child labour

Poverty (structural vulnerability) is a key driver in children's migration and engagement in child labour. Children's employment can lead to separation from their parents, or separation can act as a 'driver' to them seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. This section looks at the experiences of those employed in hazardous forms of labour, defined as 'any work that has detrimental effects on a child's health, safety or morals' and the living conditions they endure (Kamei, 2018, p 1117; Daly et al, 2020). Individual vulnerabilities, such as, father's death and living without parental care place children at greater risk of being engaged in hazardous forms of labour, particularly if they do not have grandparents as their head of household (Kamei, 2018). Those living with divorced, single or step parents, where there is conflict, are also more likely to migrate for labour (Daly et al, 2020).

Lack of employment opportunities in rural areas (structural vulnerability) lead children to migrate to the cities. Media representations of city life and as well as other children returning to the villages after working in the cities, having acquired new technologies such as mobile phones, incentivise others to make the same journey (Daly et al, 2020).

The most prevalent types of hazardous labour engaged in by child labourers in Nepal involve carrying heavy loads; in urban areas children in construction and factories work with dangerous tools/machinery and are exposed to dust, fumes and gas (Kamei, 2018). Those working in the brick kilns, work long hours, undertake heavy manual labour and report many

health problems such as headaches, coughs, fever, respiratory problems, nutritional deficiency, stomach problems, musculo-skeletal, dermatological, auditory injury and stress (Daly et al, 2020). Their accommodation is poor, damp and cramped with a lack of sanitary toilets and safe drinking water (Daly et al, 2020). Children may live with their families but sometimes they are separated becoming 'secondary migrants' (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p 400) This leads to increased vulnerability as independent children face particular 'psychological distress' with 'separation from peers and wider kinship groups …. and difficulties in making social bonds' (Daly et al, 2020, p9).

The hazardous nature of carpet weaving led to children under 16 in Nepal being prohibited from engaging in the activity under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1999. Nonetheless an estimated 10,907 children continued to be employed in the trade in 2012, accounting for a fifth of the labour force in Nepal (Edmonds and Shrestha, 2014). Carpet weaving exerts a heavy physical toll with spinal injuries, arthritis, respiratory problems and eyesight damage and is associated with human trafficking and bonded labour (Edmonds and Shrestha, 2014).

Girls working in carpet and garment weaving factories in Kathmandu valley work long hours and late at night (Puri and Cleland, 2007). Often arriving in the city 'unaccompanied' and finding 'lodgings in mixed-sex hostels', they are 'exposed to a wide range of new social networks, ideas and behaviours' (Puri and Cleland, 2007, p 1364). Living and working conditions provided opportunity for sexual exploitation and high levels of sexual harassment and incidents of rape have been reported (Puri and Cleland, 2007). Most girls were unmarried, had a low level of education and belonged to the Tamang ethnic group, their individual vulnerabilities meant they were unable to 'protect themselves' because of the personal consequences of reporting perpetrators (Puri and Cleland, 2007, p 1379). Girls often reported being enticed to leave for a better job in another Nepali or Indian city by a broker who worked in the factory (Simkhada, 2008).

Trafficked children

The illegal nature of child trafficking and the intricate networks involved means it is impossible to know the number of children in Nepal affected by this trade. Children may be trafficked to undertake domestic labour or circus work or become sex workers (Tsutsumi et al, 2008). Most are trafficked into sex work in India (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008; Simkhada, 2008). Estimates vary but suggest at least 5,000-7,000 Nepali girls and women are trafficked each year and 200,000 are working in Indian brothels (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008), others suggest as many as 12,000-30,000 Nepali girls and women are trafficked each year (Simkhada, 2008).

Structural vulnerabilities including poverty, employment as a child labourer and lack of education increase a child's vulnerability to trafficking (Adhikari and Turton, 2020; Simkhada, 2008; Tsutsumi et al, 2008). 'The ignorance and naivete of rural populations' as well as difficulties around birth registration exacerbate the situation (Simkhada, 2008, p244; Adhikari and Turton, 2020).

The processes and pathways by which children are trafficked are varied and complex, with girls drawn into the sex trade by false promises of employment, fraudulent marriage, visit offers and sometimes by force (abduction) (Simkhada, 2008). Sex trafficking is most often initiated by someone known to the girl or by a relative – an uncle, cousin or stepfather (Simkhada, 2008; Tsutsumi et al, 2008). Sometimes local women already in the sex trade in India return to villages and act as recruiters (Simkhada, 2008).

Individual vulnerabilities, such as gender discrimination, place females at particular risk, with those from marginalised ethnic groups or castes at greater risk (although there are some indications the situation is changing with higher caste groups equally exposed) (Adhikari and Turton, 2020). Family situations, such as the absence of a mother or father, divorce or re-marriage, dysfunctional families or alcohol dependent parents place girls at greater risk (Adhikari and Turton, 2020). Those forced to become sex workers are often older, more likely to be married, have child(ren), have fewer family members and be less educated than those forced to work in the circus or in domestic labour (Tsutsumi et al, 2008). One study found a third of sexually trafficked girls were married and 2% were divorced or widowed (Simkhada, 2008). Abandonment by husbands meant girls often faced being ostracised by the community and their families could be reluctant to offer support for fear of the negative impact on their standing in the community (Simkhada, 2008). They could also be unwilling, or unable, to take on the costs of providing for unmarried or widowed girls (Simkhada, 2008).

Girls' lives in the brothels in India are strictly controlled, they experience psychological and physical abuse, know little about monetary arrangements and very few have occasional communication with their families (Simkhada, 2008). Trafficking survivors exhibit a very high level of anxiety and depression, this was almost universal across those who had become sex workers, many of whom also showed signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Tsutsumi et al, 2008; Crawford and Kaufman, 2008).

The aim of NGOs working with survivors of sex trafficking is their reintegration, preferably into the home community but given the stigma attached, it is often very difficult to gain acceptance (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008; Simkhada, 2008). Successful reintegration has been associated with providing survivors with income-generating skills which enable survivors to provide for themselves and help their family, education programmes which reduce the stigma

around being trafficked and the expertise and local knowledge of Nepalese women working in the NGO (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008).

Lack of identity documents

Lack of identity documents is a major problem for many Nepali children separated from their parents and contributes to the ease with which they can be trafficked (Khan, 2021). Nepal's 'historically lax approach to birth registration …. particularly in the rural areas …. works to the advantage of traffickers ….. [because] it is easier to falsify the age of unregistered children [and for a broker to issue] false documents for such children' (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p401).

Recent estimates indicate that only 77% of children in Nepal have had their birth registered (UNICEF, 2019). Historical laxness in national certification means there is no mechanism to identify missing children and there are significant difficulties for those working with separated and vulnerable children in verifying their ages, making 'it easy for traffickers, and in some cases authorities, to forge documentation as children in this position have little or no proof of identity' (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p401).

Current legislation requires the birth of a child to be notified to the local registrar's office (ward office) within 35 days (Department of National ID and Civil Registration, 2022). This must be done by the father or mother, (or in the absence of the parents, a family member who is aged 18 years or over and has Nepali citizenship) using the prescribed notification form. Officers in the registrar's office check the accuracy of the information provided. In cases where the informant is unable to read officers complete the form on the applicant's behalf with the information they provide. This is then read aloud to ensure the information is recorded correctly, following which the applicant is asked for their fingerprint as signature. A birth certificate is generated after all the information is uploaded. Failure to meet the deadline of 35 days results in a fine of Rs 200 (Department of National ID and Civil Registration, 2022).

The government insists all children need a birth certificate for school admission but this does not take account of those already in school (Adhikari and Turton, 2020). Having no birth certificate documentation creates difficulties in acquiring citizenship at the age of 16 and a lack of identity documents prevents children being able to work legally or pursue higher education studies (Laurie et al, 2015; Khan, 2021). Without citizenship, individuals are unable to access government services, obtain a marriage certificate or passport, find somewhere to live, access health care, open a bank account, own or transfer property in their own name and confer citizenship on their children (Laurie et al, 2015; Richardson et al, 2016).

Historically, women needed a male relative, usually their husband or father, to endorse their citizenship application, a situation that changed with the introduction of the Nepal Citizenship Act, 2006 (Laurie et al, 2015). This Act (introduced on 26 November 2006) provided for Nepali Citizenship to be acquired by descent, by birth or by naturalization.

Any child born to a father or mother who is a citizen of Nepal, has Nepali citizenship by descent, as has 'every child found in the territory of Nepal, whose paternal and maternal addresses are undetermined…. until its father or mother are found' (Nepal Citizenship Act, 2006). (Provision for children 'born out of wedlock' to a Nepali mother and foreign national are considered under the acquisition by naturalization provisions).

Any person born in Nepal before 13 April 1990, who has resided there permanently is deemed to be 'a citizen of Nepal by birth' (Nepal Citizenship Act, 2006). Provision was made for those wanting to obtain a citizenship certificate to apply within 2 years of the Act being implemented. The Act sets out how Nepali citizenship can be acquired by naturalization by: foreign women married to a Nepali citizen and children born to a Nepali mother from marriage with a foreign citizen who is permanently resident in Nepal. It is not possible for Nepali citizens to hold dual nationality so in certain cases acquisition of Nepali citizenship may require renunciation of foreign citizenship and voluntary acquisition of citizenship of another foreign country automatically leads to the loss of Nepalese citizenship.

The process for filing an application to obtain a Citizenship certificate is outlined in the Act. For those aged 16 and over, acquiring citizenship by descent, involves filing an application and providing 'Nepalese Citizenship Certificate of descendants of relatives within three generations from paternal or maternal or self side' as well as a 'recommendation from the concerned Village Development or Municipality certifying the place of birth and relationship' (Section 8 (i) (a) and (b). Those aged 16 and over, acquiring citizenship by birth, need to file an application and provide a 'recommendation from the concerned Village Development Committee or Municipality certifying the birth in Nepal and residing permanently in Nepal' as well as evidence of the 'Land Title Deed Ownership Certificate in the name of self or family or Certificate of Land Tilling Right or proof of house or listing of his name or the names of his father or mother in the Voters' list prepared by the Election Commission' (Section 8 (ii) (a) and (b). Nepalese Citizenship Certificates are awarded following evaluation of the evidence produced. Where such evidence cannot be provided by the applicant, there is provision for a Nepalese Citizenship Certificate to be awarded through 'on the spot investigation' which involves at least three people who have obtained Nepalese Citizenship Certificate and reside in the same Ward and are acquainted with the applicant, confirming their identity (Section 8 (iv).

However, despite the ‘Supreme Court ruling in 2011 supporting the provision for mothers as well as fathers to confer citizenship on their children’, there are indications this legislation is not implemented in practice (Richardson et al, 2016, p335). The rural nature of Nepal is a significant factor in citizens being able to establish their citizenship rights, with issues relating to implementation and monitoring at the local level and ‘traditional attitudes’ being ‘harder to challenge’ (Richardson et al, 2016, p337). It is an individual’s responsibility to provide documentation to local officials and the bureaucratic processes can be challenging, requiring the co-operation of other family members, often husbands and fathers. For women involved in inter-caste marriages, or where her marriage was not accepted by her own parents, or where marriage dissolution has taken place or for those returning from trafficking situations, such co-operation may not be available (Laurie et al, 2015). It is also problematic for many children including those who moved from rural villages to boarding schools in Kathmandu, who dedicate ‘excessive time and effort towards securing identity documents during return trips [to their village] which reduced time for working there to fund their studies’ (Khan, 2021, p9).

Conclusion

This section identified the different ways in which children are separated from their parent(s) and described some of their experiences. The impact of separation is influenced by the family circumstances in which children find themselves. There are some indications that living with one parent while the other works abroad, or, living with grandparents while both parents work abroad can have a beneficial effect (Kharel et al, 2021; Kamei, 2018). However, where children experience their parent’s re-marriage, or even re-marriages, their situation may be less clear, particularly where structural vulnerabilities, such as, lack of educational and employment opportunities in rural areas impact on their lives.

Where structural vulnerabilities such as poverty combine with lack of educational and employment opportunities, children’s vulnerabilities are increased and those who find themselves in difficult family circumstances that place them at risk of harm are at increased risk of being trafficked into domestic labour, hazardous forms of labour or in the case of girls, the sex trade. By researching practitioners’ experiences of working with separated children in Kathmandu, this study aims to identify the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents, to understand children’s experiences and to identify the ways of working they use to support these children. The next section will explain the research design and methods used. It will describe how the data was collected and the process of thematic data analysis.

Research Methods

This section explains the research design and the methods used in the study. It considers the ethical issues involved before going on to describe how the data was collected and the process of thematic data analysis. The section concludes by identifying the key emergent themes which are used to report the findings in the next section. However, it starts by identifying the aims of the study and the target audience.

Aims

The aim of the study was to research practitioner's views on the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu to gain insight into the nature of their experiences and the situations they faced. The research objectives were to:

1. Identify the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents

2. Understand children's experiences of separation from their parents from the perspective of practitioners working with them

3. Identify any strategies, interventions or ways of working used by practitioners to support these children

The target audience was practitioners working in NGOs and child welfare agencies in Kathmandu who have experience of working with separated children. Ten organisations were identified as fitting these criteria and were therefore approached with an invitation to take part in the study (see Appendix 6). The research team had professional working relationships with all these organisations prior to the study and aimed to recruit 2 practitioners from each organisation.

The research team comprised; Dr Susan Kay-Flowers, Senior Lecturer in Education and Early Childhood Studies at Liverpool John Moores University (Principal Investigator), Ms Pradipta Kadambari, Principal at Kadambari Memorial College of Science and Management (KMC), Kathmandu, Nepal, Dr Nalini Lama, Research Coordinator at KMC and the following Social Work Interns from KMC; Mr Yabesh Adhikari, Ms Tapashya Chapagain, Ms Rupa K.C and Ms Simran Kunwar.

Research methods

The study used semi-structured interviews to investigate practitioners' experiences. An interview schedule (see Appendix 1) was specifically designed for the study and shared with the interviewee in advance. Semi-structured interviews focus on the issues under investigation and allow interviewees' responses to be compared but also provide flexibility,

allowing areas of particular interest to be followed up. In this way themes of interest emerging during the interview can be identified by the interviewee and pursued.

The interview started by asking practitioners about their current role, how long they had worked in that role and at the organisation, whether they had previous experience of working in a child welfare organisation or NGO, their qualifications and training. This data provided a context for their views. It went on to focus on the following areas of interest:

- Understandings of 'parental separation'
- The extent to which parental separation affected children in the setting
- The experiences of children facing parental separation
- Their responses and the setting's responses to the needs of separated children
- Identifying good practice
- Identifying any areas requiring further attention

Ethical issues

Research team meetings were held, and an ethics workshop delivered by the PI to ensure a consistent team approach in seeking and securing participants' consent, conducting the interviews, data storage and analysis of the data. Ethical approval for the study was granted by Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

After ethical approval was granted the Manager or Chief Executive Officer of each organisation was contacted by email and invited to take part in the study. These professionals acted as the Gatekeeper to their organisation. They were provided with a Gatekeeper Information Sheet (Appendix 3) which explained the aims of the study and a Gatekeeper Consent Form (Appendix 2) which asked whether they would be willing for their organisation to take part. The forms were provided in Nepali and in English to ensure gatekeepers had a full understanding of what was involved. If they were willing for their organisation to participate, they were asked to sign the consent form and return it by email to the Principal Investigator (English consent forms) or to the Contact in Nepal (Nepali consent forms).

Gatekeeper Consent having been received they were then asked to promote the study among those practitioners who had experience of working with separated children to see if they were willing to participate. Copies of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 4), Participant Consent Form (Appendix 5) and Interview Schedule (Appendix 1) in Nepali and English were provided to forward on to potential participants.

The Participant Information Sheet explained that taking part involved being interviewed by two members of the research team via Zoom. With their permission the interview would be recorded. Interviews could be conducted in Nepali or English and were expected to take about 45 minutes. Their comments would be anonymous and their identities, as well as their place of work, would be kept confidential in the writing up of the study. Practitioners would be identified by an identifier code only, this was to ensure they were able to talk openly and honestly as well as to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the children and families with whom they worked (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018).

If they were willing to take part in the study, they were asked to sign the Participant Consent Form (Appendix 5) and return it by email to the Principal Investigator (English consent forms) or to the Contact in Nepal (Nepali Consent Forms) indicating whether they wanted the interview to be conducted in Nepali or English. On receipt of the signed consent forms, two members of the research team were selected to conduct the interview, reflecting the participant's choice of language.

Data collection

The interviews took place via Zoom, due to the Covid pandemic. This safeguarded participants and the research team. Interviews were allocated across the team according to the language choice of the participant. All members of the team were fluent in Nepali and English apart from the PI who was fluent in English only. Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team (research pair), one of whom took on the role of lead interviewer and was responsible for arranging a suitable time for the interview to take place

Using Zoom provided participants with flexibility in determining the location for the interview and removed the need for travelling time. It allowed ease of recording and enabled all members of the research team to take part in the interviews, irrespective of whether they were based in Nepal or the UK. These were significant advantages.

Twenty participants from ten NGOs and child welfare agencies in Kathmandu took part in the study. All consented to their interview being recorded. The language choice of all participants, apart from one, was Nepali. Interviews took place in June-August 2021. Recordings were stored on a password protected computer and then transferred to the PI's password protected Liverpool John Moores University computer. They were deleted from these devices as soon as the interview was transcribed into English which was done as soon as possible after the interview.

Data analysis

An identifier code was allocated to each recorded interview and the research pair took responsibility for transcribing the interviews into English. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy by Ms Kadambari and Dr Lama and amended, if necessary, before being shared with the team. Key themes emerged from team discussion of the transcripts. These determined the codes used to categorise the data and allowed thematic analysis to be undertaken. Following team discussion the PI used the codes shown in Table 1 below to categorise the data. Each transcript was examined, and the codes used to categorise the data.

1. Reasons for separation from parents
2. Migration for work – choice or exploitation?
3. Gender discrimination
4. Ethnicity/caste
5. Family environment including quality of parental care
6. Presence of domestic violence?
7. The impact of poverty
8. Urbanisation
9. What children experience as a result of being separated from their parents
10. The difficulties separated children face after leaving home
11. Separated children's fear of police
12. Lack of birth certification and citizenship issues
13. Opportunities for re-integration with family or community
14. Conceptual understandings of 'children facing parental separation'
15. Government responses to separated children
16. Examples of good practice
17. The impact of the Covid pandemic
18. Other themes

Table 1: Codes used to categorise data

Following coding, transcripts were analysed according to each code enabling themes to be identified. Analysis of each transcript was then shared with all members of the research team

to check whether understandings and interpretations were accurate. This subjected the data to further scrutiny and more detailed analysis. The key themes emerging from the data analysis were as follows: the reasons why children were separated from their parents; separated children's experiences after leaving home; the difficulties they faced; issues relating to birth and citizenship registration; examples of good practice and government responses. These themes are used as headings to report the findings in the following section.

Findings

This section reports the findings of the study. It uses key themes that emerged from the data analysis to report them under the following headings:

1. Reasons why children are separated from their parents
2. Separated children's experiences after leaving home
3. The difficulties separated children face
4. Issues relating to birth and citizenship registration
5. Good practice
6. Government responses

Practitioners' own words are used to report their thoughts therefore, their comments are reported in detail in this section. A list of interviewer codes and the nature of their work can be found in Appendix 6. Direct quotations are denoted using speech marks with the interviewer code in brackets afterwards. Brackets [ ] are used to indicate where words have been inserted and a series of full stops (….) where words have been omitted to aid the flow and support reader's understanding.

Sample

Twenty practitioners from 10 child welfare agencies and NGOs in Kathmandu took part in the study. The organisations worked with children in different situations, some worked with street children and their families, others with girls who had been trafficked into the entertainment industry and others with those who had been 'trafficked' into orphanages despite having parents (see Appendix 6). They all worked with separated children with the aim of supporting and improving their lives. They did this in a variety of ways, some providing accommodation, others educational and employment opportunities and others specialist counselling in an attempt to reintegrate the child with their family. Thirteen practitioners were female and six were male, all had at least 2 years' experience of working in this field, most had considerably more and had been working in this field for decades.

1. Reasons for children's separation

Five main themes emerged from practitioners' accounts of why children were separated from their parents, these were: family structure, family life experiences, poverty, education and child trafficking. The prevalence of these reasons in practitioners' accounts is shown in Figure 1 overleaf. While each theme is examined separately here, they were often interlinked in accounts.

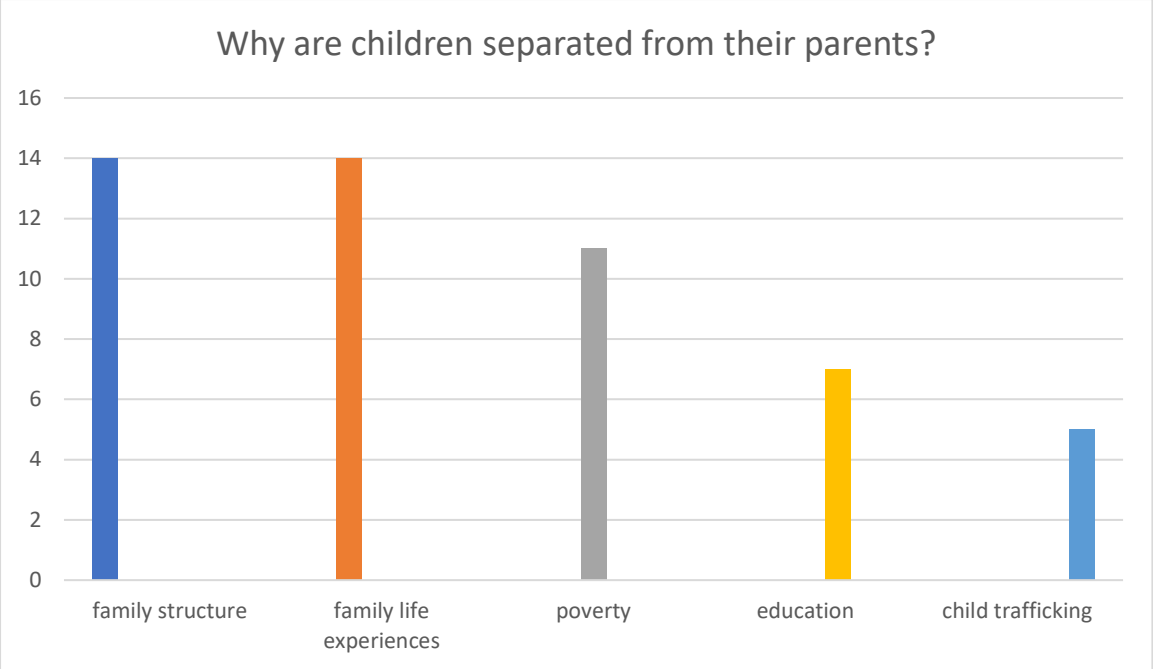

Figure 1 - Why children separated from their parents

i) Family structure

Most practitioners (fourteen) (001, 005, 006, 007, 008, 010, 011, 012, 013, 014, 017, 018, 019, 020) referred to family structure being an issue that led to children being separated from their parents.

In their experience, many children lived in one parent families due to parents migrating (001, 005, 006, 010, 019), separating (011, 013, 018) or obtaining a divorce (010). Sometimes a parent was in prison (019). In many cases, parents re-married (005, 006, 007, 012, 014, 019, 020) and the child acquired step-parents (011, 013, 018), which left the child 'in the middle' and 'not looked after' (012). Sometimes parents had multiple marriages, particularly where 'the father goes abroad' for employment, the mother re-married, raising questions of 'where shall the child go?' and often leaving the child 'stranded' (010). Unable to be looked after by grandparents, the child is sent to live with relatives who, after a time, are unable to provide for them because they need to care for their own family. At this point the child is sent to work in a different place (010) or brought to the child care home by relatives (007) or by villagers, which has become an increasing trend in remote areas (014).

Re-marriage may be informal and, in the case of mothers, was often a response to the child's father going abroad for employment. One practitioner described how, in their experience, many of the children's fathers undertook labour work and, while they were working, entered into another marriage, meaning he might be 'married to three or four women at the same time and keep them in different places' (006).

> ‘if the father goes away, the mother will remarry and the children will be a mess and in the same way, if the mother goes then the father will not take good care of the children, he might get into another affair or another marriage. Also, if the mother or the father went abroad and told someone to look after the children, they didn’t take good care. So no matter who leaves either the mother or the father, it will always be a mess for the children. In most of the cases that we have seen from the streets, the parents are abroad for employment and the children are on the streets begging or working in hotels’ (006)

In such situations, children often found the home environment was not what they wanted, they felt unloved, uncared for and lacked support. In some instances, they became involved in domestic labour or were abused, others left of their own accord,

> ‘they will head to live in the city, and after entering the city head to the border then they take a train to India but they will not have an idea of where they will end up after boarding the train….the rules of India are strict, after seeing such children, the child welfare committee will take them to care homes. Now the parents will not have any idea where the child has ended up’ (019)

One practitioner referred to large families (those containing 10-12 children) and explained how when there were ‘fights in the family’ the children, or the parent(s) often chose to ‘walk away’ (020). Children from large families were vulnerable to cross border trafficking, as poor parents in remote villages who struggled to meet their children’s basic needs were targeted by traffickers, who offered to look after them and provide education, food and clothing (019).

Six practitioners (001, 007, 010, 013, 014, 018) referred to children’s separation due to the death of their parent(s) in disasters such as, the earthquake of 2015 (001, 014), or the civil war which led to many children living in children’s homes (013, 014). Other children had witnessed personal tragedies, such as, their mother committing suicide (018).

In other cases, practitioners were unaware of the child’s family situation due to them being abandoned. Four practitioners (001, 008, 017, 019) referred to such experiences. One gave accounts of rescuing children and babies from the ‘dumping area’ in the Kathmandu valley area, having been alerted to their situation by concerned individuals (008). One setting, (017), kept a place on stand-by for referrals from emergency services that rescued abandoned children or those on the streets, so they could meet children’s immediate needs in the short-term.

ii) Family life experiences

Most practitioners (fourteen) (001, 002, 003, 005, 006, 007, 009, 011, 012, 013, 015, 017, 019, 020) identified negative family life experiences which caused children to leave home and become separated from their parents. Five themes emerged, these were; witnessing domestic violence, experiencing abuse and/or neglect, lack of parental care, living conditions and child labour. While each theme is examined separately below, they were often interlinked in accounts.

Domestic violence (003, 006, 009, 011, 012, 013, 020) including violent parents and parental beatings, were experiences that often pushed 'children away from their home' (009). Many children had witnessed 'fights and quarrels in the house', which meant they 'would not want to go home' (006). Sometimes quarrels were exacerbated by parent(s) going out and consuming alcohol (012). This practitioner estimated about 95% of the boys their organisation worked with had been affected by domestic violence (012). They worked with other organisations which worked with girls to coordinate responses to sibling groups.

Many children, particularly girls, had been victims of parental abuse and/or neglect (001, 002, 005, 019). In one situation, two girls aged 5 and 6, who had been raped by their father, had to be separated from their mother and father for their own protection (001). In some cases, a child's situation came to light as a result of concerns being raised by a sister, already living in the setting (002).

In a process known as 'chhaupadi' menstruating girls faced difficulties as a result of being kept separate from the family and given more work than usual to do (Parker and Standing, 2019). One practitioner explained

> 'if after all that work, they get some time, then they get scolded for staying idle and are even beaten. After getting beaten, being scolded and not feeling secure enough they start to think life is already so hard so they will just go along with their friends to Kathmandu' (005)

The lack of parental care shown in these accounts was also present in others (006, 007, 015) and was often cited as a reason why children 'walked away'

> 'children leave home because they don't get good care from their parents, for example, children can survive by eating just one meal a day, but they need good care and love in a good family environment' (006)

Sometimes parents were 'ignorant and careless, unable to take up responsibility for their children' believing the notion that 'when the child is born, they will grow up by themselves' (015).

Practitioners pointed to children 'feeling lonely' and 'running away from home when they do not get love or feel loved there' (007). Sometimes the issues children faced were due to

> 'parents themselves having problems…. If the parents become a victim, the child will become vulnerable and this is the cause of separation' (015)

The family's migration sometimes led to their separation. One practitioner explained when people leave their village and move to the cities, 'they don't have the earnings they expected' so

> 'They go to work in the morning leaving the children alone, and slowly the children start going out, roaming around, they don't go to school. [there is a] lack of proper care. About 10% of these children's families will be on the streets, living somewhere in the temple, somewhere on the road. They have no particular place to live, and they come to the streets through the family' (006)

Children described their lack of privacy when sharing one room with the whole family

> 'Inside the same room there is a side for the kitchen, a bed, and sometimes there will be two or three children and parents living in a room. So, after the age of 12, 13 and 14, the children will start feeling odd with their parents having sex in the same room, so they start going to their friend's place and the parents will also encourage them to stay at their friend's place'

> 'These children ……. influence each other and start living somewhere else. Some boys and girls will start living in guest houses if they earn money….. there is a kind of stress on the father or the mother, and that stress is by their children, they wish their children would not come, or would come home late [or] … lived somewhere else' (006)

Six practitioners (005, 009, 013, 015, 017, 019) identified child labour as a reason for children's separation. One described the routine of labour in the villages where children aged 13 or 14

> 'have to wake up early and go to work …[collecting] the firewood from the jungle and then after bringing it back home, have to cook food. If their step-mother has cooked the food, they eat otherwise they have to cook it by themselves. Even before going to collect the firewood, they have to do the cleaning of the house. Then they cannot rest…. If there is work from someone else, they go to work. They do not get paid for their work, they are given some food grains and some come to help them during their work just like they went to help them. That's how it works. Getting back home in the evening they cook for dinner, eat and sleep in one corner. Not being able to eat properly, not being able to sleep properly. It is a labour' (005)

These conditions can motivate a child to leave the village and seek work elsewhere. It can also influence parental decision-making because

> ‘they believe that their child will earn, will be skilled and get a certain amount as salary. This way the children are pushed from village to the city’ (019)

iii) Poverty

Eleven practitioners (001, 002, 003, 005, 007, 009, 010, 013, 014, 018, 019) identified poverty as a cause of children’s separation from their parents. Its impact was multi-faceted and understood in terms of ‘economic poverty’, that is, parents’ inability to meet their children’s basic needs, as well as ‘mental poverty’, that is, parents’ lack of education and awareness of their needs (002).

Economic poverty related to having limited or very low income, which meant parents struggled to feed, clothe and educate their children. The failure to provide necessities, meant children felt ‘like they don’t have anyone who will look after them’ (007). Lack of awareness about family planning resulted in many children and

> ‘problems for feeding and providing basic needs. If they provide a meal in the morning, they have nothing to give in the evening’ (014)

Some parents left their girls in a setting which provided education for children living in vulnerable situations because they knew these needs would be met.

The family economy was a major push factor for children moving to the city. In some cases, children migrated with their parents where they worked in brick factories carrying ‘heavy loads’ in ‘a hot place for a whole day’ doing ‘work which they cannot do’, in this way they contributed to the family’s daily labour wages (017). Sometimes their parents

> ‘go to labour work and bring what they earn in the evening but spend it on alcohol. They don't even know where their children are, they are in their own world. So, the children will be on the streets busy begging’ (019)

In this way children end up separated from their parents and living on the streets (019).

In many cases, children became engaged in labour after being separated from their parents. Some went to work as a domestic workers, living ‘in someone else's house as a helper (015).

Practitioners associated these children’s experiences with ‘mental poverty’, that is, parent’s lack of education and awareness of their needs (002, 010, 019), which placed children at risk of being separated from their parents (009). Many parents living in remote areas sought to

provide better educational opportunities for their children and were vulnerable to being targeted by traffickers (010). Those with many children were at particular risk.

iv) Education

Seven practitioners (001, 009, 010, 013, 014, 016, 019) identified education as an important pull factor in children being separated from their parents. They pointed to the poor quality of education in rural areas

> 'the government schools in our community, which are supposed to provide quality education, [are failing to provide] a quality education' (016)

> 'in the remote villages there are schools but, there aren't teachers. Very few teachers come. They only take the attendance and leave and there won't be any study. It's not that there isn't a school but, because there is no infrastructure and the absence of the teacher the family themselves think … "I have been not able to study but, I will let my child study" (014)

Aspirations for their children's education, combined with their lack of education, meant parents were vulnerable to their children being 'lured' to the cities with promises of better opportunities and better care (009, 014, 019).

> 'parents are convinced that their children would get better education there. And they will be less of a burden in the family because they are economically poor, and if someone else is taking care of their children, then it would be a win-win situation' (009)

As a result

> 'protection is always given second priority by parents, and education is given first priority. The thought of being in a good city school is the reason to send them to study here… Due to such thinking most of them are sent for educational purposes' (016)

In some instances, child care homes make a business out of this situation. While some of the children in child care homes were orphans, one practitioner (009) estimated that about 70-75% were separated from living parents, although 'according to the Nepalese law, only orphan children have the right to live in an orphanage' (013).

There was evidence of parents having to pay children's homes for their child to attend school

> 'They say they will provide free education but for that, at the beginning they ask for some money…. [In one case] the Nepal government had rescued children from one children's home … 4 children from one family were sent to a children's home in Kathmandu. At first 3 daughters were sent so for each girl [the mother] paid Rs 10000

for the admission. She had taken a loan to pay for it. After some time, it was hard to look after the other son as she was a single mother and …. she had no job [so] under influence of others she decided to send the son as well… she was told it will cost more for the son….. they said Rs 45000' (014)

v) Child trafficking

Five practitioners (010, 012, 013, 014, 020) identified child trafficking as a reason why children were separated from their parents. One explained how the term referred to children 'displaced from their family, village, society to another place for the benefit of a third person' and how 'different types of benefit are taken from these children, such as sending them to child labour, institutions and child care homes' (013). In the setting where they worked about 90% of trafficked children had one or both parents alive and had been brought to an orphanage by 'a middle man luring them with false promises…. various excuses and lucrative offers' (013).

Another described how many employers claim they were 'forced to keep the child at work, saying it is really hard for him/her', or they brought 'the child to work to show others that he/she is helping the child' (010).

However, increasing public awareness protects and empowers children at risk of child trafficking as one practitioner explained,

> 'Not everyone will see the children when they look at the children. We always see what we want to see, we are looking at what we like, everyone does that … [but] when some people notice these children, they will contact us, and the children are protected. In some cases, the road connected groups that work on the road will support and help. We also have a contact centre …. in the new bus park. There is coordination with the public bus transport and if there is any child at any time who gets on the buses, then they will call our contact centre and bring the child to us in a safe manner…. [this includes those] found by police patrols, and by volunteers. Recently, we have seen children themselves contacting the child helpline number … they call there themselves if they are in trouble' (020)

2. Separated children's experiences after leaving home

Four main themes emerged from practitioners' accounts of separated children's experiences once they had left home, these were; abuse and neglect, lack of parental and family support, increased independence/resilience and trauma and psychological stress. The prevalence of these experiences is shown in Figure 2 overleaf. While each theme is examined separately, they were often interlinked in accounts.

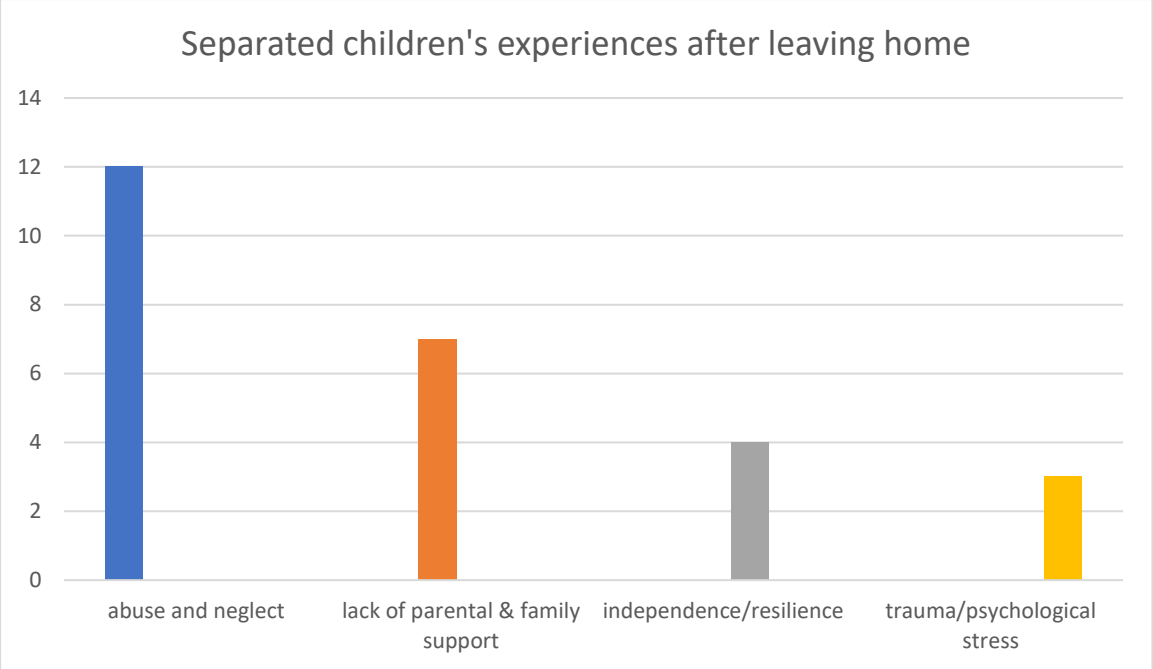

Figure 2 - Separated children's experiences after leaving home

i) Abuse and neglect

Practitioners' accounts showed that while many children moved to avoid abusive situations in their home environment, many continued to experience abuse and neglect after they left home, this time at the hands of strangers and without any support from wider family or the community.

Twelve practitioners (002, 003, 004, 005, 007, 010, 012, 014, 016, 017, 019, 020) described the abuse and neglect some separated children experienced. One summed up their situation saying,

> 'There is nothing they have not experienced' (012)

Nine (002, 003, 007, 010, 012, 014, 016, 019, 020) described the physical abuse and neglect children experienced, which sometimes started on the journey after leaving home,

> 'there are some children … who [are] continuously abused … abused at home as well as on the way. They get abused by those who claim to help them, who [they] come into contact [with], and then they run away from there and go to another place to avoid it, but it happens again and again. If they reach their destination after two days, [sometimes] they [have been] abused 4 or 5 times on the way…. the risk is greater in our society while travelling' (020)

Those travelling by public transport during the day were at less risk than those travelling in 'trucks [bringing] vegetables or goods' at night particularly 'if they need help from someone' (020).

> 'In the beginning [these children] are very self-respecting. They will be looking for jobs. They will be hungry, but they won't go to a place like hotels and ask for food, but rather ask for job or work to do. But in the process of maintaining that self-esteem, they come into contact with bad people, then they suffer' (020)

Children were employed in a variety of work situations, including domestic labour and restaurants. Others were trafficked into the entertainment or sex industry or circus work. Many were abused in their work situation either through 'physical violence from employers [or] …..verbal or emotional abuse and [exposure to] traumatic situations… [or] neglect' (003).

A practitioner described one child's experience of working as a domestic worker

> 'she lived in the house of a very good government employee, but she is not treated in a way that she should have been kept. …..She was a small child and …. she was not allowed to eat or drink, she was not allowed to come out of the compound of the house and she was not even paid. She was kept as a prisoner, but she managed to escape on her own and was recently rescued by the police' (016)

On arrival at the setting the practitioner noted, these children's

> 'hands are dirty. They are weary and very thin. The clothes they are wearing do not fit their body maybe because they are the clothes of the employer's children' (016)

The lack of freedom child domestic workers had also meant that they were

> 'a little scared when new people come, scared to talk to them. They will live in the employer's house and will always be unsure about if they can eat something that they like. They have to wait for the employer and ask if they can eat and drink that' (016)

Other children worked in restaurants, where they were subjected to physical abuse and living conditions were very poor

> 'the owner beats them, all the workers have to sleep in the same place. Even in winter they have to sleep on a cold floor, they don't get a room, they have to share blankets. Later when they share their story, they tell that they remembered their mother at that time and thought they would die at that place.

> Some children have never seen a city before …. so they feel strange in the new place …… They were be warned [they would] be punished if they went outside of the workplace by their owner.
>
> They are given the leftovers from the restaurant they work at, they are not provided [with] basic hygiene facilities…… The children miss their family, parents, grandparents, especially during the festivals and holidays. They wonder about their family, and siblings during that time. Some children simply blame their destiny and fate for their situation' (019)

This practitioner explained

> 'The logic of [the] owners [is] that they have provided food to children who were deprived of food, have provided skills, that's what they think is enough for the child, and they are not even a bit concerned about the safety and injury that child might face while working. They won't understand the pain and the suffering of the child' (019)

Some children experienced sexual abuse. One practitioner described how those rescued from circus work said the

> 'trainers would abuse the girls by touching [and] placing restriction on food during the training period [they were made to] …. work all day and night long…… [and when they] shared the story that they used to be abused in the place where they slept, no one would listen to them and they would be beaten' (019)

Among young girls (aged 13-18) working in the entertainment industry alcohol and drug use were endemic. Initially forced to drink by their employer, it was used as a way of coping with their situation as one practitioner explained

> 'Everyone drinks alcohol…. if she has just come from the village she will start drinking within a week. If she doesn't drink, she won't get her money.
>
> 'There are …. girls who say that once they use drugs or take alcohol they do not care what the guests do with them…. These girls do not like to do these kind of things so after having drugs or alcohol they do not know much about what is happening and so after taking it they are ready to accept it….. Some say that the only thing left is taking drugs through syringes. And after taking drugs the kind of relaxation and satisfaction which they get, cannot be gained from any other things, they said. It is very hard to work with the girls in this situation' (005).

Those who escaped could be subjected to extreme violence as described in one practitioner's account

> 'when she ran away from the brothel, she was caught by the boys and bouncers of the brothel and was severely beaten ….. when they thought she [had] died, they threw her on a railway track. In the morning …. a policeman saw her and found she was alive and admitted her to the hospital. After that they brought her to the border ….. she was handed to us and we brought her to Kathmandu and her treatment [was organised]' (002).

Those living on the streets were vulnerable to sexual abuse and one practitioner estimated 90-95 % of the boys she worked with, had such experiences

> 'Even very small children are affected. The younger ones share it without understanding, while the older ones have understood it…. They try to show the same kind of behaviour sometimes, and when that happens, we give them counselling …. That's when the children openly say everything, what they've seen, what they have done ….. [Some have been] tortured, the child can't speak… if he is treated like that, then they have suffered a lot while being on the streets of Kathmandu. They share, the more they trust us the more they will open up' (012).

One practitioner gave the example of children being abused by the owner of an orphanage. This came to light when a 7 year old girl 'imitated a sexual activity in her daily activities' (014). Art therapy work undertaken with her which led to the discovery that she had witnessed the husband of the female owner of the orphanage sexually abusing the older girls (aged 12 and 13 years). The matter was referred to the police and the couple were arrested.

ii) **Lack of parental and family support**

Seven practitioners (001, 005, 006, 007, 016, 017, 018) referred to children's lack of parental and family support. Some (005, 006, 016, 018) described socialisation within the family and picked up on the emotional effect of being without parental support. They identified the 'insecurity' many children separated from their parents felt and how it raised questions about whether other people who came into their lives would remain, and whether they could be trusted (016, 018).

> 'Those children who stay with the family know how to be safe from childhood, how to live or … get support. They feel …. supported. They also have fun things and when they go through hard times they will remember that their family would support [them] … these things add to their inner strength…. they can feel it and get support no matter what age they reach ….. Those children who are separated from their parents don't

> have such memories. And sometimes we hear things like, “I do not feel safe anywhere.” If they do not feel secure enough from the inside, they won’t feel safe outside. Their inner resources are in crisis…. It can be seen in their behaviour’ (005)

One practitioner described how separated children miss out on relationships with their siblings and relatives

> ‘They are deprived of the feelings of family and relatives too….Children who are separated from their families are ‘like a horse without a bridle’. No matter how many organisations support them, their education or provide accommodation, the children will be frustrated, they don't see a purpose in life or any motivation to do well…..they have stress of their own, depression is a common psychosocial problem’ (006)

In some cases, this led to the loss of a children’s own culture, as one practitioner described when a girl living as a domestic worker in a ‘Brahmin, Chettri household’

> ‘picked [up] the habit of worshiping and praying, she forgot everything about her caste. After reintegrating at home she had a problem in that house…..[Her] family is more likely to sell and to make alcohol according to their caste. So, after seeing the nature of [her family’s] work, it became difficult for her to live with them, and she attempted suicide. When [asked why]…. she said that she can never be around alcohol …. she had difficulty in adjusting to her family as they dealt with alcohol every day, which she despised very much’ (016)

Practitioners described the impact the lack of contact with parents had on children. One said 50% of children they worked with had parents who did not call or show concern for them and noted the visible difference

> ‘Amongst the children who receive calls and [whose] families come to visit them, the children's bond with them…. seems positive. On the other hand, many families do not visit or even call. In the family meetings, when we force them only then do they come. In such cases it is apparent that families are not willing to contact the children. It is frustrating for children. They feel like, “they brought me here and left me here, but there is no care or concern for me”’ (017)

Another said

> ‘I have seen [those] children who don't have parents. They ask me to play the role of their mother and make such calls. They like to speak with their mother. You know how I feel in that situation? They have always thought that if they had their mother/ father

today they wouldn't be living in this setting. Rather they would have been able to live with their father and mother. Sometimes they come to us and share such feelings and cry' (001)

As children matured they developed 'attractions to the opposite sex', which could create tensions leading to 'fights' for residential settings, meaning children were accommodated in single sex units (006). Practitioners recognised children's increasing maturity which placed responsibilities on staff and on the setting, with one practitioner expressing fears that

> 'once they become teenagers we become scared of them running away with their lovers or with another person. They are still at a very young age and we are scared they might take rash decisions. We are scared for their safety, they might end up with bad influences' (007)

Working with children on plans for their future, including forming adult relationships was part of practitioners' work, as one practitioner explained

> 'Every child or girl we met in this field; they had a dream….. Everyone has a dream of getting married and having their own family. For that they have to know how they should be. What kind of dream they see and there obviously comes the thing about their mom and dad. Some children who have been separated from their parents have mentioned that while walking in the street, when they see a child holding their mother's hand, they feel jealous about not being able to walk like this, and they question why they didn't get to walk like that. They will expect the same from their children when they have them' (005)

iii) Increased independence/ resilience

Four practitioners (001, 003, 019, 020) found some children felt an increased sense of independence and resilience following separation from their parents. Their increased confidence came from being able to work, to contribute to their family's situation as well as learning and developing new skills.

> 'They think they are independent, can earn for themselves, manage all the expenses for themselves. Even the children who are working in the stone breaking work …. say that 'I earn it myself'….They want to earn for their sibling's education, medication and treatment for parents, they understand their responsibility towards their family…..they know the trick of what to do to survive ….. They have knowledge of what is needed in order to survive, what kind of strategy they have to adopt, how to present themselves, and how courageous they have to be' (020)

Others saw their increased practicality as linked to their learning and development of skills within the setting (001, 019).

> ‘The children who don't have parents are more practical because we teach them everything. As they grow they understand well. We tell them how [the setting] brought them here and takes care of them, how much it costs in a day, and what it does for them. They can calculate themselves how much it costs for their studies and food’ (001)

> ‘Later, when they will be able to read and write, the child won’t get lost anywhere outside, they will be able to read the signs and address in the board, calculate numbers and money….. they can calculate how much they would earn for so and so months (019).

iv) Trauma/ psychological stress

Three practitioners (003, 004, 005) referred specifically to the trauma and psychological stress felt by separated children living in Kathmandu where they spent all their time with strangers. One described the changes

> ‘These children are brought to the city after leaving the villages from the hills and the plains. At once they see big buildings, see unfamiliar faces and have to live with strangers. And those strangers don't say good words, they don't behave nicely, and all these things are new to them.
>
> In Kathmandu they are given a mosquito-infested place, where they can't sleep through the night, the 8-9 year old has to carry water jars [20 ltrs] upstairs from two floors below and is not given food until 11 or 12 pm by the owners’ (003)

Another described the methods by which girls working in the entertainment industry came under bondage

> ‘Before they get their [first] salary …. they are taken to buy dresses as they wish and are taken to visit the markets. When they first come …. they really love Kathmandu … In the beginning to get them to like the work they buy new modern fashionable clothes for them and the money spent on the dresses and other things is shown later in the calculation. So, the owner ….. gives very little of [their salary] to the girls. Now because they have very little money, they cannot go anywhere else to work.
>
> They work hard but do not get paid for their work on time……. Also the owner makes excuses and bring up different reasons like you broke a glass or you came late or you

misbehaved with the guests and didn't treat them well, giving all sorts of different reasons and deducting their money.

During raids they get further into bondage… the police arrest the clients or the owner in some places [as well as] the girls……They do not have any money so their owner takes them out of jail on bail which costs a minimum of 20,000 to 25,000 [rupees]. Now [they have to] re-pay the owner..… The owner has created an environment in which they spend [their] money on food and clothing [therefore] …. they do not have savings at all. And all they can do is depend on the owner' (005).

As a result of these experiences children start to think

'"I have become useless, I shouldn't have come here"….. It's not the work they had thought of…... so they think "I have become useless here, I am trapped now, my dignity is gone, now my life is over, what will I do if people find out about it?" This kind of psychological stress starts in their life…. they think "What if the family found out at home? What would I do after going home? I have already made a mistake"' (004)

Consequently, they

'don't have the confidence to go home. They don't even see the option to get out of there and do something. Because of the feeling that they are 'spoiled', they face more psychological stress' (004)

3. The difficulties separated children faced

Four main themes emerged from practitioners' accounts of the difficulties separated children faced, these were emotional issues, behavioural responses, relationships with parents and education/training. The prevalence of emotional issues in practitioners' accounts is shown in Figure 3 overleaf.

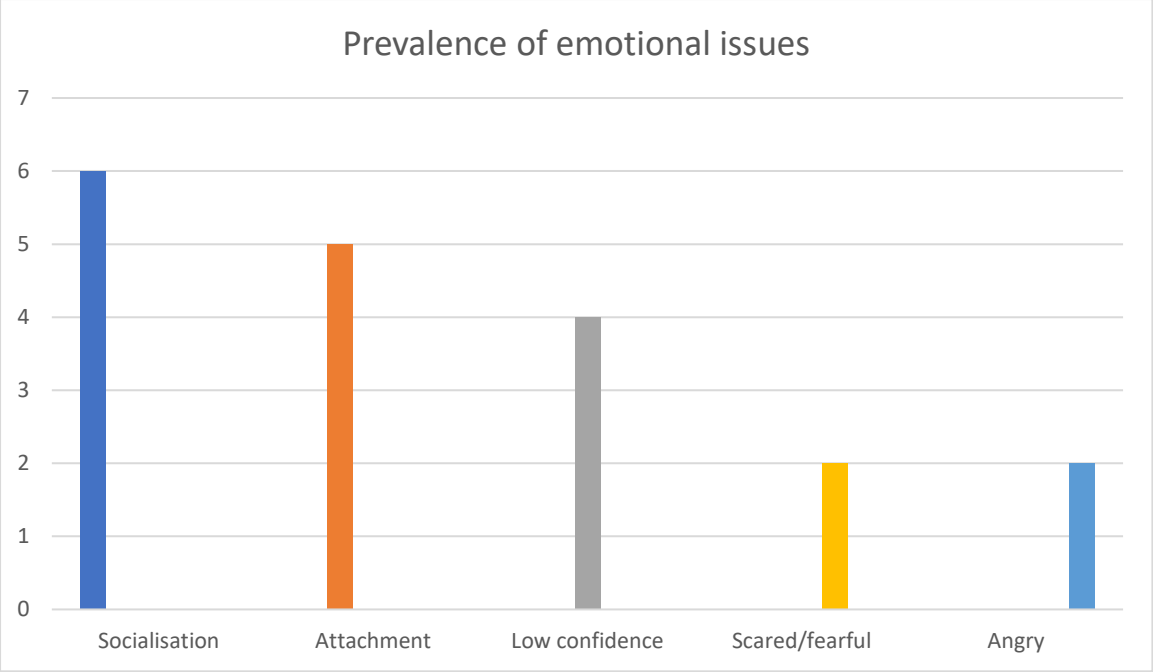

Figure 3 – Prevalence of emotional issues

i) Emotional issues

Many practitioners identified the emotional issues separated children faced as a result of their experiences, these included socialisation and attachment issues and the feelings these generated.

a) Socialisation

Six practitioners (012, 013, 014, 015, 018, 019) referred to socialisation, some pointing to the gaps in 'language and culture' that 'children who do not grow with their parents have' which make it 'hard' for those in their setting 'to socialise' (013). This meant they lacked knowledge about rituals and traditions which created difficulties when trying to re-integrate children with their families.

One gave the example of reintegrating a boy, rescued from living 'in a hotel in Kathmandu' after being trafficked, with his family

> 'when we took the child to his home, he was 14 years old … but what we observed … was he didn't know how to greet his grandparents, he had forgotten his culture, his mother tongue….. They will lose their identity if they don't know about their family heritage, culture. Luckily, he is still living in his village' (019)

They pointed to the need to accommodate girls living near enough to their families so they could

> ‘send them home during holidays. If we don’t send them back to their families during holidays, they will not learn to cook on the traditional stove (chulo) because not everyone has an access to gas stove. We also make them practice this’ (019).

These issues were closely associated with children’s self identity. Practitioners pointed to the different ‘lifestyle in cities’ and ‘rules and regulations’ in settings ‘that leads the child to have an identity crisis’ (014). Those who had moved frequently or were aware that where they were staying was a temporary arrangement, often questioned where they belonged which, if not addressed, developed into self doubt and low confidence (017). Items from their home could promote a sense of belonging and practitioners found these items, even a ‘torn cloth’ were treasured (015).

Learning about ‘basic practices and rituals’ (018) and helping children learn ‘to get along….how to solve their problems, how to adjust … to go to the community tomorrow’ (012) was an important aspect of many practitioners’ work.

b) Attachment

Five practitioners (014, 015, 017, 018, 019) referred to the attachment issues many children had with their family as a result of their separation. One practitioner described ‘the long years that the children were not able to spend with their family’, pointing out

> ‘the same number of years is lost by the parents too…..So … that bonding is already broken. And the longer the gap is, the longer time [it takes] to bring the closeness’ (014).

This means those aged 13 or 14 years old

> ‘do not have the encouragement and willingness for the connection. They have friends here and they think when he/she was in need of their parents, their parents left them. Therefore “Why should I now talk with my parents?”… and it is not their fault because they were abandoned when they were small’ (014)

While they have lived in the child care home, some have siblings and

> ‘the other child has grown up with the family…..When we re-unite the child with the family they start understanding their family. The child feels that the family is loving the child who has grown up with them more than him/her. They feel unloved…. Because of this there is a kind of gap among the siblings’ (014)

The time away means when they do go home

> ‘there are people they don’t know how they are connected to and don’t know how to speak with them….. What to say, how to say it’ (018)

Sometimes this has implications in other areas of their life. They may find it difficult to make friends in college or school because ‘they are afraid of disclosing their past and this fear holds them back always’ (014).

Alternatively, children may address this lack of ‘emotional attachment’ by forming ‘fast or quick attachments with the opposite sex’ (015) or by bonding with foreign volunteers working on short term placements in the orphanage (014). One practitioner observed how some children became ‘attached [and] connect quickly, attracted to the foreigner’s lifestyle’ (014). They described how when one person leaves, they become attached to the next. They start

> ‘they build a dream, “tomorrow I will go to Australia, Korea and study” [but] when they have built those dreams, it doesn’t come true. They grow up with dreams which never get fulfilled, and the children are psychologically affected. These harms are lifelong for the children.
>
> ‘They believe that “I am not worthy of being loved by anyone, [to have] love from anyone”. This [builds] an inferiority complex within the child who has grown up in the child care home. This is extremely harmful to the children’ (014)

c) Feelings

Practitioners described the emotions they most commonly observed in separated children which were low confidence (010, 013, 014, 017), being scared or fearful (007, 013) and feeling angry (001, 015).

One practitioner noted children separated from their parents often felt

> ‘“Whatever or however I am, I have to survive”. He/she cannot hold his/her head high and is always looking down and because of always looking down they have low confidence levels and ….. live in fear… “What should I do? Where should I go?” He/she is always stressed’ (010)

Often they questioned their own ability and how they are perceived by others. They tend to

> ‘develop [an] inferiority complex’ which contributes to their level ‘of dependency, even for minor things’ (014)
>
> ‘"Can I do it or not? How do others look at me? What is their perception of me as I have come from that background‘ (017)

They ‘fear making mistakes’ and that ‘others say something’ to them, this ‘fear grows in them since childhood. So, they can never express what is inside them’ (013).

Sometimes their fear was part of the initial settling in phase

> ‘They are afraid that we will send them to some other child shelter or to the police after 2-3 days…. they misunderstand our intentions, so we need to stay alert on the first night …[because] we have found them very restless and, in a state, where they must be watched’ (019)

It could also be related to school admissions where they fear anyone knowing them or learning of their identity (002).

In some cases, children felt angry (001, 015). Sometimes this was linked to previous experiences, as one practitioner explained

> ‘If she was sold by a woman, she gets angry at the elder girls in the home. If there is a stepmother, she does not want to listen to us…… Sometimes they don't even talk to anyone for a long time. They are wondering if they had been brought to a similar place again…. “Will they do the same to me here?”’ (001)

ii) Behavioural responses

Practitioners identified the behavioural responses they most commonly witnessed, these were running away (002, 003, 006, 012, 013, 014, 015, 017, 018), inability to trust (002, 011, 015, 016, 017, 018), aggression (001, 012, 014, 015), telling lies (001, 011, 015, 016), attention seeking (004, 011, 014, 017) and self harm (014, 017). The prevalence of behavioural responses in practitioners’ accounts is shown overleaf in Figure 4.

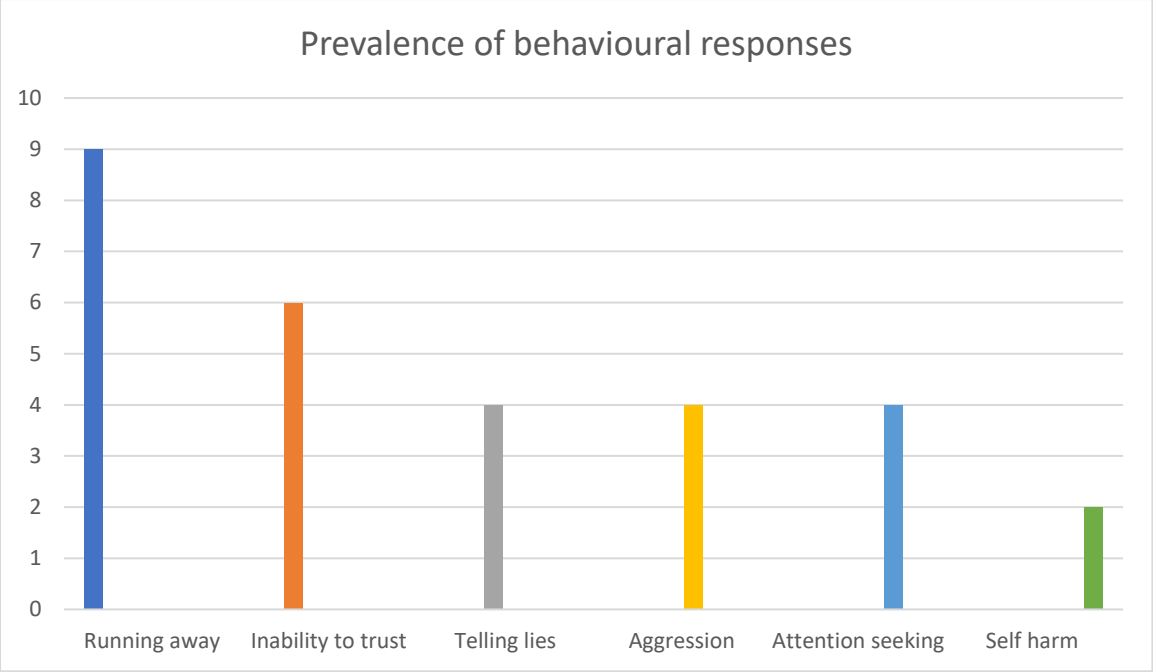

Figure 4 – Prevalence of behavioural responses

Nine practitioners (002, 003, 006, 012, 013, 014, 015, 017, 018) referred to children running away. While this was not a common experience in their organisations, practitioners understood children's motivations.

Those who had lived on the street, were used to making decisions for themselves and different ways of earning money, so if they did not

> 'like to participate in various activities ….. They like to go to Thamel [a tourist spot] and have fun, wanting to earn money from foreigners and men. They think it is fun. They [also] wonder what has happened to the places they used to roam around, they miss being out. On average 5 to 6 percent of the children try to escape and run away' (006)

The desire for freedom was associated with children's difficulty in following rules

> 'they worked in the entertainment sector ….so it was difficult for them to follow the rules and regulations [of] our organisation. When they did not get that freedom, they ran away. But … in the end they returned back to us again [because] the kind of services we were providing made them feel safe and secure' (015)

Another practitioner explained

> 'They want freedom, one of them ran away saying she was going to meet her boyfriend. She came back saying she spent time with her boyfriend…..[Another] ran from school saying that she was bored' (002)

Where children had issues with addiction, sometimes they 'dropped out' of the setting because they felt they 'cannot abide by the rules' any longer (012).

In some cases, running away was based on the desire to re-connect with their family, as one practitioner explained when in their setting they taught the children to cycle to develop their life skills

> 'After that every child's fantasy was to run away with a cycle to their home [and] one child was able to run away [from the shelter]. But for us it was a panic time as the child was not able to ride the cycle well…. We searched the whole night and even reported [the matter to] the police…. Finally, we found the child after 2- 3 days in Baneshwar [place in Kathmandu] where the child was showing his cycle to his friends. We then brought the child with us again' (003)

Sometimes children's decisions to run away reflected the anxieties and uncertainties they felt in the initial adjustment phase (017, 018).

The inability to trust was widespread (002, 011, 015, 016, 017, 018). Children found it hard to 'trust anyone easily' as one practitioner explained

> 'When a child gets separated, too many people enter in the child's life…… they get exposure to many people….. They develop a behaviour of manipulation, "How to please people, [get them] to look at me?"' (011)

Sometimes this was characteristic of the initial phase (016, 017) but it was also associated with telling lies (001, 002, 011, 016) or 'talking differently with different people' (015). In some cases, this could be due to embarrassment such as, when a child wet the bed and went on to deny it (015) or fear (001). Increased ratios of staff in some child care homes had increased oversight and children's accountability, leading to a reduction in lying (011).

One practitioner acknowledged it was part of relationship building and children gaining trust in them

> 'In the beginning …. they give a lot of fake information, because they are not sure talking with us will help them and they are unaware it is better for them. So, it is very difficult to make them trust us, and make them realise that it is better for their future to trust us. When they trust us, they start sharing everything about themselves' (016)

Four practitioners (001, 012, 014, 015) described how separated children could display 'very aggressive behaviour' (012). Often this was associated with the initial settling in phase and the anger and fear they felt in the new setting (001, 015).

It could also stem from previous experiences. For example in 'their past child care home' which 'used to allow older children to discipline the younger children' including beatings which 'set their habits' (014).

Sometimes children were aggressive and did not speak

> 'sometimes they don't talk to anyone for a long time' (001)

In one setting interest in football was used as a strategic response with playing 'football twice a day' used to increase 'self-confidence' and self control (012).

Practitioners (004, 011, 014, 017) recognised some children engaged in attention seeking behaviours particularly when others were receiving attention (011). This could involve 'speaking loudly' or performing 'different acts which are not accepted according to our rules' (017).

Two practitioners (014, 017) identified 'self harm' as an issue for some children but did not elaborate.

iii) Relationships with parents

Six practitioners (004, 005, 006, 009, 013, 020) identified the difficulties separated children faced in relationships with their parents. These were linked to some of the issues identified in the socialisation and attachment sections above. One practitioner observed how separated children

> 'don't understand the importance of family as they have a broken connection with them as they have been living without family for 8-10 years. [The] family doesn't care about [the] children and vice versa' (013)

This means

> 'they will not learn about the relationships among the family, like how a grandfather/grandmother should be taken care of in the family, the love. He/she will be in that position one day but won't know the roles and responsibilities.' (019)

Some children were angered by their parents' behaviour in which case they

> 'don't say [anything] at all. If one of the parents is married to someone else, they do not want to say it…. Some say it's all because of my parents and some don't know, but because of them they are angry. Despite this, the biggest support they get is from the family … so they search for their mother and father. That is something very natural' (005)

Others

> ‘are frustrated because nobody in their family and even on the streets showed them love and good behaviour. Their mother beat them at home and didn’t love them, so …. they are frustrated. Talking about their need to connect with family is sometimes difficult to say…. They want to be connected with their family, they want to live with their family but not now. They think about how their mother, father, siblings are doing. So, these children wish to go to the village and live with the family, if nobody does bad things to them. They want to be treated as humans, that is something they wish for’ (006)

Where children lived on the street, the ‘community’ often became ‘their family’, as one practitioner explained

> ‘society doesn't support these children. As they don't have parents, [there is] no one for them. So the biggest challenge for us is these children … will say, "the community is the worst thing in the world, and also the family"…. They think that their street community is good because they give them food if they are starving, a job or help them if they are in need’ (020)

iv) Education and training

Five practitioners (001, 002, 004, 006, 012) referred to the lack of education most separated children had received. They were keen to make education and training a priority, ensure children were enrolled in different schools across Kathmandu (001, 002, 004) and encouraged their participation in different activities such as, ‘dance classes [and] guitar classes’ (002).

However, this was not without difficulty, for while many children knew

> ‘studying is important, they think they are not capable of studying …. They say that in schools they were teased by other students [and by] teachers when they were not able to study well, or if they couldn't write properly’ (006)

Increasing children’s confidence and self esteem so they could participate in education was an aim within many settings. Educating street children was a particular challenge, as one practitioner explained

> ‘It is very difficult to teach at the beginning. Some children come to the streets because of difficulty in studying. Parents scold them when they fail for many years. If we try to make them focus on that, it's hard. [Through] counselling we try to encourage them to study, tell them about the importance of education and having an aim in life, and slowly they will try to study’ (012)

One way was by encouraging 'them to do things they are good at' through coordination with teachers at school and talking about their skills, they are encouraged to participate in clubs in school and to enter competitions so 'we help them get chances like any other child, while doing that, they can realise their potential. We motivate them in that way' (012)

Vocational training was often provided for older children, this could involve 'beauty parlour' work and 'driving' (001, 002).

4. Issues relating to birth and citizenship registration

Seven practitioners (001, 002, 006, 008, 012, 019, 020) raised issues relating to the birth and citizenship registration of separated children. They identified the difficulties this created for individuals in securing employment and accessing services. It was evident much of their time was spent supporting children seeking citizenship certificates and that the procedures involved created challenges. In some cases, practitioners and founders in the organisations identified adoption as the only possible way to secure a child's citizenship and had taken this course of action with individual children. The entitlement, rights, obligations and responsibilities of an adopted child are the same as that of a biological child which can lead to unforeseen issues if the child later claims entitlement from the adoption which the adoptive parent understood as limited to providing a legal identity (section 178, The Civil Code, 2017). Practitioners highlighted the need for a coordinated response from the government to address this issue.

The issues were recognised as intergenerational in nature

> 'Many won't even have a birth certificate as their parents themselves won't have [a] citizenship certificate' (019)

While difficulties in obtaining birth and citizenship documentation were not restricted to separated children, it was 'common to those who cannot contact their family' (001) and had major implications for their lives.

> 'There are problems like not getting jobs and [being] prohibited from [accessing] the services they could get from the status as a citizen of Nepal' (001)

The issue of being able to 'prove' they were a 'citizen of Nepal' was one that had emerged over time.

> 'We didn't know then to be a citizen legally is a very important thing..... This is the main challenge because we didn't know where they were from when we brought them [here]. They were little and nobody told us what we needed to do. Now the struggle is to give them the identity as Nepali.... Their school[ing] is over they are going to colleges

> and citizenship is very much needed…. [We] found them in the street and kept them in the organisation but now it is creating practical problems' (008)

This practitioner went on to explain that 'if the parents and relatives of the little children are known', obtaining such documentation 'is easy' and in the case of rescues, police 'can raise a complaint (muchulka) which gives standing to the children for citizenship' but

> 'in many cases the relatives don't want to take the responsibility of them. Even having first cousins doesn't have any value for getting citizenship. [Children] don't have a birth certificate and since there is no one to take responsibility for the birth certificate, citizenship becomes very difficult' (008)

Children sitting the SEE exam need to complete a registration form to register with the national examination board which involves presenting their birth certificate. For those under 16 sometimes this can be managed so they can sit the exam

> '[we] submit a letter to the school guaranteeing they will submit the certificate soon' (001)

However, they remain unable to get their citizenship certificate at the age of 16 due to their parent's lack of citizenship or other documents of proof. This prevents them getting work, or, if they do secure employment, risks it being terminated as well as progressing in their education because admission to a university course requires a citizenship certificate. One practitioner described how they 'coordinated with the education office' and had 'gone many times to the ward and municipal offices but nothing happened' (001). Their frustrations in dealing with ward and municipal offices were apparent.

Another described their 'success' in taking 'out the citizenship of two people, [who] didn't have any families' by becoming 'protectors' (002). They had help from the local government to become a 'protector' which referred to a child protection worker in an NGO, acting as a 'guardian' to protect the child.

Another referred to 'founding members' within the organisation who had strong, long-standing relationships with the children taking on the role of 'guardians' through adoption

> '[the children] are given citizenship in our own name by the founding members through adoption because we have to move them forward. Their childhood was here in this organisation but their whole life doesn't belong here…. So, we decided and some of us are giving our own name to them. The one who is adopted has the name as a father and mother. The organisation has brought him up, one who adopts gives his/her surname but the name of the organisation is not mentioned anywhere' (008)

This was seen as the only option for securing citizenship for some children where despite strenuous efforts to trace them 'the father and mother were unknown' (008). However, the nature of adoption could lead to 'property claims' at a later date and new rules on adoption which mean 'only [those] who don't have children and cannot have a child in future can adopt', could make it very difficult to find people willing to adopt (008).

However, where citizenship documents were secured, this was not without its difficulties for as one practitioner explained

> 'When the name of parents is not mentioned in citizenship [papers individuals] get disrespect and they are perceived as second class citizens' (020)

Consequently, when they apply for jobs

> 'like in a bank, someone might disrespect them as soon as they see the citizenship card….. they will become angry sometimes. Those children have to carry that aggression for the rest of their lives' (020)

On occasions, children's situations were complicated by them not telling the truth about their origins. 'For example, they will say their parents are dead even though they are alive' (006).

Another example was a boy living 'in the slum area of Kapan with his grandmother' because 'both his parents are married to different people' who claimed 'his home and family' were in Dharan (006). Comprehensive enquiries were made including a visit to the area and investigations undertaken with the district education office which confirmed they did not have a school with that name. When asked why he did this, he said 'because he wanted to travel to Dharan' (006).

In a further example a boy from the 'Shrestha caste' stated in his SLC examination that he was from 'a Joshi caste, he filled all his documents by writing he was a Joshi' (006). The consequences are that he

> 'has been deprived of his original caste family…. and [has to] either drop out of studying because the value of all his mark sheets is now zero as there is a false family name, or he now has to abandon his family identity' (006)

Practitioners highlighted the need for support from wider society and a coordinated response from the government to address this issue. Pointing to the 'obstacles' these children faced one practitioner explained how

> 'even when the children reach 18 years of age we can't let them go on their own. We have to support them till the age of 30-34. I have taken out citizenship for a 34 year

> old. So, because of this, we have to think from the angle of how our society is supporting such children …. It is our social norms, our beliefs, our culture, our attitude towards these children, that needs to be improved, not the children' (020)

Because

> 'as they grow up ….. they will be well educated, they have talent, and in future they will want to go abroad or get a job, and citizenship will be very much needed' (020)

Recognising that adoption was an emergency, short term solution to the current situation, another recommended that the

> 'Government should work on how to provide citizenship to those children who have been separated without the process of adoption..... If the children are not identified where they are from but if they are born in Nepal, on that basis it should be given to them. We have proof that they have been with us since 2003 [for example] [from] medical billing, [or] the school [that] has a record of children studying here …. and if the school recommends that the child in their institution and in place of parent's name, they could write the name of the organisation. There should be such provision' (008)

These views were echoed by another who stated

> 'The efforts from the institutions won't be enough until the government gets involved. There has been good intentions from the government to facilitate [this] for a few years now… there is talk of birth certificate, birth, caste…..before we [only] received emails inquiring about how many have it and how many don't. It is the responsibility of the state for such [children] who do not have a family, isn't it?' (012)

5. Good practice

Practitioners identified examples of good practice within their organisations and two main themes emerged; firstly, approaches to assessment and ways of working with children, including continuity of care and different practices; secondly, the provision of different kinds of education, training and employment.

i) Assessment and ways of working with children

Practitioners emphasised the importance of assessment in identifying individual needs as well as the need for continuity of care. Some identified practices that had been introduced in their organisation to support separated children.

a) Assessment

Practitioners (005, 011, 012, 013, 014, 015, 019) explained how their work was informed by assessment of the child, their parent (usually mother) where possible and the home environment, in this way they worked with the whole family. Field visits were often part of this process.

One practitioner (014) working with children rescued from orphanages and institutional homes described how

> 'As soon as a child comes to our care, we fulfil the immediate needs of the child….. It takes time to understand children, but we have a professional and experienced team [that] can find out the needs of children after some time. Children do not share everything at once but when they build a good relationship, it becomes easy to tell all the things. We should know their likes and dislikes….so we can tell their parents. When children go back to their families, parents have ideas of what their children like but during the time that the child lived away from them, they have changed' (014)

Assessing a child's individual needs was an essential pre-requisite to providing counselling and they went on to explain how this was undertaken. They described how practitioners visited the child's family to assess their needs and provide support as most of the families 'have low incomes or are below the poverty line', they also coordinate with the wards to 'make them accountable' (014). 'Counselling with children and families goes side by side' (014). Counselling was also seen as a way of helping children to build their confidence levels (003), this sometimes took the form of group counselling (001, 012).

One organisation provided a mobile counselling camp to undertake assessments and identify 'children's needs and different ways to help them' (005). Only when this was complete did the organisation provide counselling, this enabled the organisation to get to know them and provide support according to their needs.

b) Continuity of care

Nine practitioners (001, 003, 004, 006, 008, 011, 013, 015, 018) emphasised the need for continuity of care while the children were in their organisation and after they left. For those in child care homes, practitioners aimed to achieve this by involving children 'in day-to-day activities in a natural way inside the home, not letting them feel they are in institutions' (003) and involving them 'in every programme and the tasks of the organisation, and spending time with them as a family rather than as an official' (015).

One (008) said

> ‘I don't think we should be strict with the children, like it's ok not to get up at 6 o'clock if there is no work. But if you don't have work and you have to get up at 6:00 it's very hard to stick to the rules. There should be rules and regulations just like the way we behave in our homes [they] should be given wisely and a sense of freedom should be given so that they become independent.....and aware of their boundaries and limitations so that they are not dependent on us after growing up’ (008)

The organisations provided different activities including birthday and farewell celebrations, respecting different beliefs, taking children to temples, eating food of their choice and celebrating all festivals (001, 003, 004).

The importance of adopting a participatory approach, where children’s voices are heard and actions taken accordingly was emphasised although it was recognised that it could take time for children to feel comfortable and confident enough to take part (003). One practitioner (006) referred to the ‘ladder approach’ in their organisation which was as a step-by-step approach to successful reintegration that required the teaching of ‘life skills, importance of family, importance of their own life’ over a 12 month period’ (006).

Continuity of care was important after children were reintegrated with their families, this was done by

> ‘following them up regularly… looking at the progress of the child, changes in the parents. [In this way] children who had not attended school, completed their high school. Some even joined university and some continued their education even after marriage’ (011)

This practitioner said their organisation had supported 200 people over the years and

> ‘we can see real change in their life. 5 of them have become nurses, 3 of them went to Australia, some of them got married and those who are living here are doing well’ (011)

They pointed out that while mothers may have faced violence and been a victim of trafficking, their children do not deserve to go through the same situation, the continuity of care they provided aimed to disrupt this cycle. Other organisations also continued to support ‘graduate children’ by providing them financial assistance to pursue a course of their interest, many continued to finance them after their studies were complete (006, 011, 013, 018).

c) Practices

Nine practitioners (001, 004, 009, 010, 011, 013, 015, 018, 019) identified some of the practices introduced in their settings.

Some found introducing suggestion boxes which were opened in the setting's group meetings allowed full discussion (001, 018). Others found complaint boxes were useful in addressing children's concerns (004, 019). Children were able to contribute to these anonymously. These were often complemented by resident meetings which were held regularly. In one case, a 'child club' had been introduced which enabled children to meet without staff present (018).

In some cases, staff expertise built up over many years was shared with other organisations, through training events (010). This included an eight-step reintegration process for children who have been trafficked (013).

Others used their expertise to undertake advocacy work. One practitioner (009) working with child labourers used

> 'different participation spaces like committees [for children to] come together and discuss their issues and plan for the intervention themselves' (009)

They found this approach had

> 'been effective, because the regular coordination with government [had led to] establishing effective policies…. for the childcare and protection of the children but the main gap [remained] the implementation of these policies and its regular monitoring' (009)

A 'positive parenting' programme which aided communication between the mother and child and improved relationships had been introduced in one organisation (011, 015). This organisation also delivered health sessions and parenting workshops as part of life skill training.

Another organisation held 'parents' meetings' which were organised by practitioners working with child labourers (010); these were held in schools and were often attended by employers acting as guardians. Held 15 to 20 times a year, they enabled the organisation to talk about different policies, the type of work children could do once they were 14 and to set up a child protection committee. In this way they were able to raise public awareness and advocate for the children.

Another practitioner highlighted how public awareness came from campaigning and the legal prosecution of cases, such as, those of children trafficked to the circus in India (019). Lengthy prison sentences given to the traffickers appeared to have been successful in bringing this practice to an end.

ii) Education, training and employment

While organisations encouraged children to return to education, they recognised this pathway was not suitable for all children. Therefore, some provided different kinds of vocational training. One that accommodated girls and women in their shelter home, provided Montessori training, coffee making and baking skills as well as driving. This organisation (004) had its own handicraft production enabling them to learn handicrafts and develop skills in creating art from wastepaper by making bags, candles, necklaces, bracelets and earrings. They were involved in marketing these products and were able to take up further training. Some women who did not stay in the shelter homes were also involved in these income generating activities. This was a sustainable social enterprise model in which women were paid for their work, developed new skills and meant the organisation was no longer solely dependent on outside funding.

Other organisations (012, 014) provided vocational training and skill development training for those aged 17 and 18 so they could develop skills to sustain themselves when they lived with families in the future. The organisations looked to the interests and capabilities of the child, showing them different possibilities and was there to guide them towards a better path.

One organisation (017) having seen the confusion in children when choosing a career, had introduced a focused programme of mentorship and internship in which 'professionals in different fields' acted as mentors to the children, sharing 'their experiences, struggles, and scope in that field'. This highlighted the availability of different options and supported career path choices. The practitioner's conclusion was that this had

> 'benefitted the children and families and it has helped to achieve a quality service' (017)

6. Government Responses

When practitioners identified issues with government responses two main themes emerged: the need for increased data collection to enable more detailed understanding of separated children and their families' needs, and the need for a more coordinated government response to improve the quality of response and provision for this group. Some went on to make recommendations that the government could introduce.

Some practitioners took the view that appropriate legislation and policies were in place, but the issue lay in their implementation. One referring to children who have been rescued from child care homes, explained how

> 'The policies are in place but their action is lacking… There are cases where the home has been closed but no action has been taken against the owner. Then the same

> owner will open another one. There is very little legal action against the owner when they abuse or are violent to the children' (014)

They said they should not be able to open any other homes but as there is no follow up, it becomes easy for them to go to another district and collect 10-12 children. They believed 'strong action' was needed to safeguard children and so people were aware the government was strict when acting in such cases (014).

Another (003) said

> 'we have laws and policies, and to some extent, we have funding as well but we lack the implementation part…..there is no proper monitoring or system' (003)

i) Need for increased data collection

Four practitioners (002, 014, 016, 017, 020) identified the government's lack of knowledge in relation to separated children as an issue, pointing to the lack of data on children and families in their local area (known as a ward) and limited conceptual understandings of trafficking.

The NGOs working with separated children need to work with parents and the wards in which they live. Therefore, the local government should have statistics and information on how many children have left their families in their area so they can reach out to the family. However, as one practitioner (016) observed, when their organisation visits the ward, it does not have this information. This creates difficulties when re-integrating the child into the family because the ward should monitor whether the child is living at home, and whether the parents have returned the child to work, because this tends to be a cycle. While the organisation aimed to work with parents, the ward, the employer and finally with the children, the absence of data meant it was only able to work with the children. Collection of government data would enable the organisation to calculate the number of children who have left home, and enable them to monitor and follow up separated children, thereby improving their responses to this group.

Others identified inaccuracies in the data collected with information missing (002, 017) and pointed to the need for 'the government [to] focus more on child welfare, strong policies, strong monitoring and research' (017) and

> 'that if the government really wants to … work on separation, then the causes of separation should be identified and the government should work on [them]' (002)

Another (020) highlighted the difficulties in tracing the parents of separated children given the absence of a child tracking system in Nepal. This meant their organisation had to rely solely on children's own accounts of their situation.

Two practitioners (013, 014) described the limitations in conceptual understandings of trafficking, pointing out that globally the term 'orphanage trafficking' is used to refer to children who are exploited for personal benefit, by being brought into a child care home. The Nepal government does not use this term, consequently there is no law against such actions. They described how their organisation had conducted a rescue by force in 2019 and the owner did not know how many children they had in their care - 120 children were rescued that night all of whom had been trafficked. Evidence was given to the police and government with a request that the owner was charged under trafficking law but as there was no law against this, the owner was charged with fraud, having taken money from families. They explained

> 'the direct cause was not addressed. If there had been a law for trafficking, it would have been a strong action. Also, others would have learnt a lesson [and] an example would have been set…. but the owner escaped with a lesser charge and this is something which the government has to really understand, reflect on and respond to' (014)

ii) Need for a more coordinated government response

Three practitioners (002, 018, 019) pointed to the need for a more coordinated government response to separated children's needs in addressing the economic needs of families to ensure children's basic needs were met thereby preventing them becoming separated in the first place, ensuring separated children's rights were recognised, and that those living in child care homes were protected.

One practitioner (018) was of the view that organisations such as theirs should not exist because children need parental care. However,

> 'the government has not introduced any policies regarding these organisations to not exist ….There are so many children who do not have either father or mother in the family, or even with [both] parents their economic condition is difficult to provide basic needs, so many children are compelled to come to the streets due to lack of care and love. This condition must be worked on. The government should make provision or do something in this sector to provide support for children who are not able to have their basic needs met, [they] must not be separated from their parents' (018)

This view was supported by others (002, 019) who suggested that the government should not end alternative care, at least not at the present time, because

> ‘I think we need homes …. [but] those homes could be owned by the government. …. NGOs are an important part, but when it comes to sustainability the government should be involved……. So many people come to us day by day…. the government has to create a system where there are different homes in different states, only having them Kathmandu is not enough’ (002)

Acknowledging government provision of free books until grade 12, one asked but

> ‘what about uniforms? pens? Are these not the causes of children getting into child labour? Are these not the causes of child separation from their parents? Also, the schools that the children are attending are very far [often they] …. have to walk one and half hours to get to their school ... [and] spend an entire day with just the food that they had at 8 in the morning because they can’t afford to spend Rs.100 on their travel and food every single day. How will they be able to study with an empty stomach?’ (019)

Pointing to the ‘huge disparity in the living standard of children living in Nepal’, they suggested

> ‘If the government actually takes a strong initiative to look after these children, these children might not have to suffer and also our country could produce a large manpower…. This [gap] can’t be closed just by NGOs, the government needs to step in and take the responsibility for these children. The government should appoint informed people that understand the sentiments of the children and are willing to collaborate with various organisations’ (019)

Four practitioners (003, 004, 006, 016) went on to make recommendations that the government could introduce to address these issues.

One (016) identified the need for children to be admitted into school ‘with ease’, suggesting that allowing children to join mid-session would promote their engagement and increase their motivation. Instead under the present system they found reintegrated children could be left ‘without doing anything for 4-5 months’.

Another (003) suggested providing money in the form of social security to children below the poverty line, could help them stay with their parents and continue their education. This would be used for their basic needs, such as clothes and food. They proposed

> ‘a sum of [at least] 1,000 to 1,500 rupees could be deposited every month….in the account of the child so that the money can be taken out by the child only and given to parents to spend wisely on the child’s basic needs’ (003)

And that a ‘proper monitoring system’ was introduced with the local authority monitoring ‘how the money is being used’ and the government monitoring if the children were attending school (003).

Another (004) suggested the issue of girls working in the entertainment sector could be minimised if the government created a mechanism that allowed them to go to school regularly and provided training through which they could make some money. They believed the government should make

> ‘efforts to create a better environment starting from the local level and employment opportunities, especially for women and girls, focused at the local level…..If income is generated at the local level then there will be a decrease in the number of children moving out from home or being separated from parents. The structure of school also needs to be improved so they want to go to school regularly to complete their studies’ (004)

One practitioner (006) identified the need for ‘a unified policy to protect and rehabilitate children at risk’ based on their organisation’s research. They went on to propose the government ensured there was at least one person dedicated to working with children in each village and ward and for there to be ‘proper child protection centres in all the districts’ so in a risky situation, there would be local coordination across districts with staff trained and experienced in working in children’s rights.

Conclusion

The findings show that many separated children faced difficulties in family relationships and at home, before they separated from their parents; indeed, this was often a ‘push’ factor in their initial decision to leave. Having left home, and without the support of any trusted adults, many children found themselves vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which sometimes started on their migratory journey. Unfamiliarity with the city environment increased their vulnerability in Kathmandu. Those who were trafficked into the city had very little agency in their situation. Others faced limited choices with little agency and struggled to make the best decisions they could to secure a safe environment.

These practitioners’ accounts providing insight into the lives children lived, identify the difficulties they faced and how lack of support from parents and family exacerbated their situation and increased their vulnerability. They also identify examples of practice in ways of working with separated children. However, they identify some of the practical difficulties associated with lack of birth and citizenship registration and the limitations of government

responses to the needs of these children. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

Discussion

In the previous section the study findings were reported using the six key themes that emerged from the data analysis. This section discusses the findings, identifying what has been learned from practitioners' accounts about the experiences of children separated from their parents in Nepal. It examines the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents and seeks to understand their experiences. It concludes by examining what can be done to support these children by considering some of the ways of working identified by practitioners in their accounts and government responses.

Different contexts

Practitioners explained the different contexts in which children were separated from their parents. They identified the impact of family structure and family life experiences, compounded by poverty as structural vulnerabilities that often brought about separation. They went on to identify the different situations that children found themselves in after leaving home, including working in domestic labour, hazardous labour, in the entertainment industry, or on the streets. Often children had been trafficked into these situations. This section will examine the factors leading to their separation.

Family structure was a dominant theme within their accounts. Some children lived with one parent due to the other living elsewhere in Nepal or abroad (Guragain et al, 2015; Kamei, 2018). Others had parents who had re-married, albeit informally, with some parents having multiple marriages. As a result, these children acquired step-parents and step-families, leading to questions about where they fitted within the family. Sometimes they were sent to live with relatives, an arrangement that was often short lived and resulted in the child being brought to a child care home. Sometimes they were simply abandoned and brought to a child care home by neighbours or when rescued. Others migrated with their family but, due to the exploitative labour conditions at their destination, faced separation becoming 'secondary migrants' as a result (Daly et al, 2020; Adhikari and Turton, 2020). Being part of a large family was a common experience among separated children. Whatever their family structure, many of these children had one thing in common – their home environment was not what they wanted it to be.

Practitioners described the negative family life experiences many children recounted. There was a high incidence of domestic violence, with an estimated 95% of boys in one organisation affected (012). Witnessing 'fights and quarrels at home', sometimes fuelled by alcohol consumption, meant many children avoided going home (006, 012). Others, particularly girls, were victims of parental abuse, in some cases this involved rape (001). Girls found the practice

of ‘chhaupadi’ difficult, it made some think as ‘life is already so hard’ they would ‘just go along with their friends to Kathmandu’ (005). These findings support those of Adhikari and Turton (2020) who found child protection issues relating to certain family structures and family life experiences placed some children at higher risk of being trafficked and that being female was an individual vulnerability that placed girls at particular risk of trafficking.

Many children described a lack of parental care. Some were left to do what they wanted during the long hours their parents worked, with no thought given to what they were doing or what they ate (006). Feeling lonely and unloved these children chose to leave home (007). Children who migrated with their family sometimes faced a similar situation; they did not attend school and during the time their parents worked, they ‘roamed around’ the streets, without a ‘particular place to live’, these children came ‘to the streets through the family’ (006). In the city, others found the condition of the whole family sharing one room problematic, particularly as teenagers when the lack of privacy meant they were aware of their parents’ sexual relationship. A common response was to stay out, often at a friend’s place but over time they ‘started living in guest houses if they earn money’ in this way they were drawn into child labour (006).

Poverty was a structural vulnerability many families in rural villages faced and was a significant factor in children being separated from their parents. Over half the practitioners (eleven) identified parents’ struggles to feed, clothe, and educate their children on a very low income as a main cause of separation.

Many parents were aspirational for their children’s education and employment and faced with the poor quality of education in rural areas, believed if their child moved to the city their opportunities would be much improved. Without education themselves, and often with a large family to look after with very little income, these parents became a target for those seeking to exploit them (009, 014, 019). Often, approached by ‘mediators’ from their own village whom they felt able to trust, these parents were offered ‘free education’ for their child in the city on payment of an initial admission fee which varied according to the child’s gender and caused the parent to take out a loan (014, 019). These mediators helped some child care homes make a business out of such situations (009) and were engaged in a form of child trafficking (referred to as ‘orphanage trafficking’ by 013 and 014) in which children were ‘displaced from their family, village, society to another place for the benefit of a third person’ who had ‘lured them with false promises….and lucrative offers’ (013). Once in the city, lack of money and difficulties in travelling around the country meant children very rarely returned to their village. Sporadic correspondence with family led to a sense of disconnection, abandonment, loneliness and loss for children (Khan, 2021).

Other parents thought their child would become skilled and earn a certain salary if they moved to the city (019). While some children saw the routine of labour there and were motivated to leave (005). These motivations often led to children becoming child labourers. Children seeking to escape unhappy family environments were at increased risk of engaging in hazardous labour and faced the psychological stress of being separated 'from peers and wider kinship groups' (Daly et al, 2020, p9).

On arrival in Kathmandu, some children worked as domestic workers in someone else's house (015, 016), others in restaurants (019), while girls were often employed in the entertainment industry (005). Some children migrated with their parents and worked in the brick factories, contributing to the 'family's daily labour wages' (017). While others were left alone while their parents worked in 'labour work' and spent their days 'on the streets busy begging' (019).

In addressing the issues separated children face, the focus needs to be on identifying the root causes of why children are separated from their parents. A key theme emanating from practitioners' accounts is the economic poverty many rural families face. With limited education and employment opportunities available in villages, many children envisage better opportunities in the city and move to Kathmandu, unaware of the risks involved. Improving education and employment opportunities in rural areas would address these causes but this requires government commitment, funding, and infrastructure to deliver. Practitioners' ideas of how this might be done are discussed in 'Government responses' below.

Understanding their experiences

Separated children's experiences were diverse. Practitioners' accounts identified the experiences they had. Abuse and neglect were common experiences and without support from parents and wider family, could lead to trauma and psychological stress. However, in some cases, living away from their parents led children to become more independent and increased their resilience. Practitioners also identified the emotional issues children faced, including socialisation and attachment issues with associated feelings as well as the behavioural responses they displayed. This section will discuss these experiences.

Many children moving to avoid abusive situations at home found they experienced abuse and neglect in their new situation. Sometimes this started on the journey with those claiming to help them subjecting them to abuse (020). Travelling alone at night in 'trucks [bringing] vegetables or goods' into the city presented particular risk (020). On arrival in the city, children found themselves in various situations, working in domestic labour, in restaurants or trafficked into the entertainment or across the border into the Indian sex industry; living 'outside of

parental care' these children were 'easily exploited' and at greater risk of working in 'hazardous environments' (Kamei, 2018, p 1121).

Practitioners' accounts of the abuse and neglect these children experienced and the very poor living conditions in which they lived make distressing reading. They describe the physical violence (003), beatings (019) and sexual abuse (012, 014, 016, 019) children experienced which occurred alongside verbal or emotional abuse (003) and neglect. Children lacked food, drink, adequate clothing or bedding (003, 016, 019), hygiene facilities (019) and were sometimes forced to take alcohol and/or drugs in order to be paid (005). Lack of freedom was endemic in these accounts. Those in the entertainment industry in Kathmandu or sex industry in India found themselves under bondage shortly after arrival (005) in contravention of Nepali and Indian laws that prohibit 'all forms of bonded and slave labour' (Simkhada, 2008, p 245). Those who tried to escape from Indian brothels were 'severely beaten' if caught (002). One practitioner summed up children's experiences, saying 'there is nothing they have not experienced' (012). The work was not what they expected, they felt 'trapped', as if their 'dignity is gone' and did not have the 'confidence to go home' experiencing 'more psychological stress' as a result (004). Extreme stigma as well as 'social norms and the possible reaction of the home community' were obstacles in restoring 'them to normal life' (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008; Simkhada, 2008, p 245). Girls who were trafficked were likely to experience anxiety, depression and PTSD with those trafficked into the sex industry exhibiting higher levels than those engaged in domestic or circus work (Tsutsumi et al, 2008).

The hazardous nature of the work many child labourers faced, combined with poor living conditions, placed them at risk of serious health issues. Without family support, they were isolated and vulnerable, which meant they were a target for traffickers. Practitioners' accounts showed this was one way in which girls were trafficked into the entertainment industry in Kathmandu. Other routes included false promises of employment, sometimes given by people including relatives and friends, known to the girl when she was living in the village (Simkhada, 2008). Girls whose family structure or family life experience in the village was not what they would want were at increased risk (Adhikari and Turton, 2020). Questioning how exploitative the work needs to be 'for a child to be considered a victim of trafficking', Adhikari and Turton (2020) point to the blurred lines 'between labour exploitation and child trafficking in practice' (p400).

The lack of parental and family support led children to feel insecure (Daly et al, 2020). This was exacerbated by living in the unfamiliar environment of the city (003). Some children were scared and fearful of new people (010, 016), others questioned whether they could be trusted (016, 018). They missed out on relationships with siblings and wider kinship (006), coming to

rely on the support of those children in the same situation as themselves in the case of those living on the street who 'think that their street community is good because they give them food when they are starving, a job or help them when they are in need' (020).

However, some children felt more independent and resilient after leaving home. These feelings came from their ability to work, to manage their own expenses and contribute to their family's income (020). They felt a responsibility towards their family and were keen 'to earn for their sibling's education, medication and treatment for parents' (020). For some, these feelings were associated with the learning and skills they had developed while in the setting (001, 019).

Practitioners highlighted how children growing up without their parents often experienced issues around their self identity. They lacked an awareness of the importance of family and the nature of family relationships as well as their culture, traditions and language which created difficulties when trying to re-integrate them with their families (013, 019). The different lifestyle in the city, the 'rules and regulations' in settings as well as different religious traditions which they sometimes followed, raised questions about their self identity and where they belonged (014, 017).

Those who had lived outside their family for many years lacked 'connection' with their parents and as they reach teenage years lacked the desire to re-connect (014). Some were angered or frustrated by their parents' behaviour due to their re-marriage (005) or the beatings they received (006). If they went home, they were unaware of who 'they are connected to and don't know how to speak with them' (018). In some cases, re-integration meant children realised their siblings had grown up in the family, which raised questions about how much they were loved and created a gap between siblings (014). This took an emotional toll and raised questions about their sense of identity (Khan, 2021).

Many separated children lacked confidence, they questioned their abilities, their decision-making, and how they were perceived by others (010, 014, 017). This could be seen in their anxieties about studying (006, 012) as well as their fear of making mistakes and sometimes led to an inability to express their feelings (013). These were areas practitioners worked on with children in their current work and in planning for their future adult lives.

Practitioners noted how children's insecurities were often seen in their struggle to trust others. They recognised that it took time to build relationships so children gained trust in them and started to share their experiences (002, 011, 015, 016, 017, 018). Meanwhile, children often told lies (001, 002), gave 'fake information' (016) or developed a 'behaviour of manipulation' (011).

In the initial settling in phase children sometimes displayed aggressive behaviour (001, 015) which could reflect behaviours they had seen in previous settings (014). In some cases, this involved running away from the setting. Almost half (nine) of the practitioners had witnessed such behaviour and, while not a common experience, saw this as associated with difficulty in adjusting to following rules in the organisation (002) and children's desire for freedom, particularly among those used to making decisions for themselves while living on the streets (006) or working in the entertainment industry (015). On occasions it was associated with the desire to re-connect with their family (003).

What can be done to support separated children?

Ways of working

Practitioners identified examples of good practice in their setting. These centred on methods of assessment, the importance of continuity of care and participatory methods which were seen as key principles of good practice.

They emphasised the importance of thorough assessment in identifying the individual needs of a child to ensure a child-centred approach was adopted. They sought to work with parents, particularly mothers, where possible, and to assess the home environment to ensure a holistic assessment of the child was undertaken. Often this was not possible, due to the child's situation which meant they had to rely solely on the child's account. They recognised it took children a long time to build trusting relationships until they felt able to talk about their lives and family situation. This meant in the short term practitioners could be working with incomplete and sometimes inaccurate information about a child's situation.

Practitioners believed that data collection at local government level would improve their ability to work with these children. Having access to information about how many children have left their families in the local ward and which families have been affected would enable practitioners to reach out to these families, to work with them and provide targeted support. It would facilitate a more complete assessment of the child's needs, enable future planning to take account of their family situation and assist in monitoring the child's situation on their return to the family.

Practitioners emphasised the importance of providing continuity of care for these children who have experienced many changes and often traumatic events in their lives and therefore, struggle to trust adults (001, 003, 004, 006, 008, 011, 013, 015, 018). This was done by encouraging children's participation in daily activities, spending informal time with them, adopting a flexible routine during free time, allowing choice in foods eaten and celebrating birthdays, significant events and all festivals. Continuity of care extended beyond the time that

children were in the setting with many practitioners reviewing the child's progress regularly following their reintegration with their family. Long term commitment to children with the opportunity to provide support even to 'graduate children' was seen as key to their success (006, 011, 013, 018).

Children's right to participate in matters that affect their lives (Article 12 UNCRC) was recognised in their voices being heard during daily activities and through the opportunity to express their views in group meetings or via suggestion or complaint boxes where children were able post comments anonymously (001, 004, 018, 019). One setting worked with child labourers in 'different participation spaces' to discuss issues and plan interventions for themselves (009). This gave voice to their experience and alongside a regular series of 'parents' meetings' for parents and guardians of child labourers in schools which provided information about what work children could do (010), had led to 'regular coordination with government' (009) and the development of effective policies as a result. Parents' meetings had been successful in raising public awareness and advocating for child labourers and had led to a local child protection committee being set up. Located in schools thereby, accessible within the local community, this is an approach worth considering in relation to raising awareness of the risks of trafficking within the community and steps parents can take to protect their children.

While settings aspired to work in partnership with parents, this was fraught with practical difficulties. However, another had set up a 'positive parenting' programme to aid communication between mother and child which had improved relationships (011, 015). This took place alongside health sessions and parenting workshops. The provision of a range of activities and workshops is an approach that may have merit when working with other groups of separated children.

Government responses

Practitioners identified the need for a more coordinated, government response to provide an effective response to the needs of separated children. They highlighted issues around birth and citizenship registration and the need for increased data collection to provide opportunities for preventative work in relation to separated children and their families as examples.

There was a belief that appropriate policy and legislation relating to separated children was in place, the issue lay in its implementation. Practitioners pointed to a lack of consistency and timeliness in local official's responses as well as little, if any, coordination of government responses. This supports previous findings by Simkhada (2008) who concluded political commitment was required to implement public policies. The difficulties separated children faced in acquiring birth and citizenship registration was a particular example which is

recognised as a significant factor placing children at risk of trafficking (Simkhada, 2008; Adhikari and Turton, 2020).

While action has been taken to ensure all births are now registered, a gap exists among older children whose births were not registered at the time. Practitioners working with these children described the difficulties they faced in securing citizenship registration and the bureaucratic processes involved. There were problems even if parents could be traced because they did not always have citizenship certificates themselves, and where children were 'unidentified', there was a need for recommendation letters from the ward office and 'neighbours of the organisation where the children grew up' to establish their identity (008).

Acquiring birth and citizenship registration was a lengthy process and could take years. Procedures involve taking documentation to the ward and municipal offices, this was time-consuming and officials were not always responsive (001). Practitioners' frustration in dealing with education offices, ward and municipal offices regarding these issues was evident in their accounts. In some cases, where a child had been in their care for many years practitioners took on the role of 'protector', in others, finding it impossible to secure citizenship registration by any other means, they adopted the child (008). These were seen as emergency, short term solutions to the current situation.

Meanwhile, without a birth certificate, children are unable to register for the SEE exam and apply for citizenship. Without citizenship, they are unable to work legally, attend university, access government services, obtain a marriage certificate or passport or confer citizenship on their children (Laurie et al, 2015; Richardson et al, 2015; Khan, 2021). Not only does this place serious limitations on their lives as a result of being unable to realise their rights to an identity, to education and to employment under the UNCRC, it also increases their risk of being employed in hazardous labour or trafficked (Kamei, 2018; Khan, 2021). Without registration there is no way of being able to trace separated children and they are vulnerable to brokers issuing false documents (Adhikari and Turton, 2020).

Practitioners highlighted the need for a coordinated governmental response to overcome the obstacles these children face in securing their right to citizenship, alongside support from wider society to understand and tackle this issue. Existing legal provisions, including Section 8 (iv) of the Nepal Citizenship Act, 2006 (on the spot investigations), allow the government to address this, it is a question of having the commitment and sufficient resources to implement them. The government has insisted all children have a birth certificate before school admission but as Adhikari and Turton (2020) point out this 'does not include children who are already attending the school' so there is a need to promote understanding among families and within the community to ensure its importance is understood (p410). Defining this issue as a key

element of the government's national child protection strategy would be a significant step forward in protecting separated children. It would also act as a precursor to development of a national database of missing children (020).

A further example of the lack of government coordination was the response when a child care home was closed due the owner's ill treatment of the children (014). The children were rescued from the home, and it was closed but no action was taken against the owner which meant he could go to another district and set up another home. While legislation and policies exist to address this issue, practitioners point to the need for these to be used and implemented consistently with a monitoring system put in place (003, 014).

A more coordinated government response would provide opportunities for preventative work with this group of children, and practitioners made various proposals as to how this could be undertaken. Their proposals fell into three groups; addressing poverty, education and alternative care. Some suggested the incidence of separation could be reduced by addressing the economic needs of families so that children's basic needs could be met (002, 018, 019). Suggestions included providing money to children below the poverty line so they could stay with their parents and continue their education (003). Others suggested admitting children to school mid session would enable them to continue in education rather than falling out of the system (016) as would the creation of 'a better environment…and employment opportunities' for girls at the local level (004). These are practical examples of school incentives that would reduce children's participation in hazardous labour and improve economic opportunities for girls reducing the risk of sex trafficking (Edmonds and Shrestha, 2014; Simkhada, 2008). In the meantime, alternative care needs to be provided to meet the needs of separated children who are on the streets or escaping from violent situations (002, 018). However, it was suggested that child care homes owned by the government, rather than NGOs, would offer a more sustainable model for the future (002, 019).

Increased data collection in relation to separated children so that wards have accurate data and are aware of how many children have left their families forms part of a more coordinated government response. Practitioners pointed to the lack of accurate data (002) and how increased data collection would enable local government to reach out to families, offering appropriate support and monitoring children's reintegration (016), and central government to 'focus more on child welfare, strong policies, strong monitoring and research' (017), maybe setting up a 'child tracking system' (020). Early indications that the move to federalism and decentralisation of power has facilitated a higher level of engagement by officials at local level and the sharing of information and data at national level during the Covid pandemic could be built upon to achieve this (Punaks and Lama, 2021).

Conclusion

This study has identified the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents in Nepal. Practitioners' rich descriptions have provided detailed understanding of their experiences leading to separation as well as those after leaving home and the difficulties they faced. In doing so, it highlights children's individual vulnerabilities as well as the structural vulnerabilities they faced.

The study highlights the extensive work undertaken by NGOs but a consistent view was that a more coordinated, government response would support a comprehensive response that would incorporate preventative work with families and communities. Practitioners highlighted two particular areas of work requiring attention - birth and citizenship registration and educating rural communities about children moving to Kathmandu for work - both of these are child protection measures.

The findings highlight the different situations separated children found themselves in in Kathmandu, the experiences they faced and the difficulties they endured. This was not what they anticipated when they left their villages to seek work and their situation remained unknown to their parents. Practitioners highlighted the need to educate rural communities about the realities of children moving to Kathmandu for work, to inform them of the practicalities (nature of the work, work hours, accommodation, payment) and the risks attached to being alone the city, in particular false promises of work. One approach to tackling this would be to use skilled and knowledgeable practitioners to deliver regular information sessions in schools in rural areas. Meetings would be open to parents, guardians and young people and would represent a way of raising public awareness and protecting children.

As practitioners pointed out appropriate legislation exists in relation to birth and citizenship registration, the difficulties lie in its implementation. Were this to be the focus of a concerted government campaign, involving ease of access to offices at the local level, greater cooperation between agencies and raising public awareness about its importance, this could increase the level of registration and secure children's legal rights. Not only is this fundamental to children's right to an identity and their ability to secure Nepali citizenship in due course, it also acts as a deterrent to child traffickers (Article 7, UNCRC).

Separated children's voices are absent in the current body of research (Adhikari and Turton, 2020; Daly et al, 2020). Yet there is a need to engage with them to give voice to their lived experience, to ensure their voices are heard and to explore what could be put in place to promote the educational and emotional well-being of separated children in Nepal. Working

alongside practitioners using participatory, creative methods in focus groups with children to give voice to their experiences will form the next part of the study.

Conclusion

Through researching practitioners' views, this study has identified the different contexts in which children are separated from their parents. Children's situations varied from those who migrated with their families and became separated due to working or living conditions in the city, to those who were engaged in child labour and those who were trafficked into domestic labour or the entertainment industry. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish 'between labour exploitation and child trafficking in practice' (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p400).

Structural vulnerabilities including poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities in rural areas and child protection issues placed some children at particular risk, especially when combined with individual vulnerabilities, such as gender, family experiences and their position within the family **(**Adhikari and Turton, 2020). These acted as 'push' factors in decision-making about travelling to Kathmandu and rendered children more vulnerable to traffickers.

In the unfamiliar environment of the city, away from the support of their family and community, children found themselves isolated and facing very difficult, exploitative working conditions. The abuse and neglect many had experienced at home and had hoped to escape continued, only this time it was perpetrated by strangers. Separated children were left feeling scared, fearful of adults and lacking confidence as a result. Some experienced trauma and psychological stress. Their situation and lack of contact with their parents meant over time, family connectedness was lost. This impacted not only on their relationships with parents, siblings and grandparents but also on knowledge and awareness of their own culture, creating difficulties in re-integration attempts.

Practitioners identified some of the ways in which they worked to support children, emphasising the importance of assessment, continuity of care and participatory methods as key principles of good practice. It is evident more could be done to support these children, but this requires government commitment and a coordinated approach in attending to the issues these children face. Preventative measures need to address the root causes, which are poverty and lack of education and employment opportunities in rural areas. These are issues that require financial investment, staff resources, central and local government cooperation, innovation, opportunities for adult education and long term planning. It also means looking at local infrastructure and strengthening it to deliver appropriate services, but there are immediate steps that can be taken in this area. In particular, addressing birth and citizenship registration and educating rural communities about children moving to Kathmandu for work. These are key areas requiring urgent attention areas if children are to be protected and their needs met.

The research relied upon practitioners' views. Through detailed accounts based on their experience and expertise, they provide unique insights into children's situations and experiences. However, like other studies, they lack the voices of separated children and there is a need for their voices to be heard, to understand fully the 'factors which leave them vulnerable' and to explore their 'understanding of their own protection and rights' (Adhikari and Turton, 2020, p420; Daly et al, 2020, p13). Therefore, the next stage of the research study will seek to address this gap by working with practitioners using participatory, creative methods with focus groups of separated children to give voice to their experience and explore what could be put in place to promote their educational and emotional well-being.

Appendix 1

Title of Project: Exploring the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu: through practitioner's lens

Interview Schedule

Personal Information

Interviewee Code Number:

Sex: Male/Female/Trans

Designation:

Name of the organization:

1. What is your current role/responsibility and how long have you worked in this role?
2. How long have you worked in this organization?
3. What has inspired you to work in this role?
4. Do you have any previous experience of working in a child welfare organization/NGO with children?
   If so, where? Could you share a little about your previous experience?
5. What are your qualifications/training?

Issues of parental separation

6. How do you understand the term 'parental separation' in your setting?

- Prompts: children who are separated from their parent(s) **OR** children whose parents are separated? Are you able to distinguish between these groups or do they overlap?

7. In your experience, how many children (%) in your setting have experienced separation from their parents (within the last 5 years)?
8. What do you see as the causes of children being separated from their parents?
9. Are you aware of the status of the parents of these children? (For example, single, never married, separated, divorced).
10. Do these children share any common characteristics? (For example, age, sex, ethnicity, geographical area).
11. What are the main reasons for children coming into child care homes?

Experiences of Children facing parental separation

12. In your experience, what issues do children have when they are separate from parents?
13. When working with these children, do you find
    i) They are usually able to maintain contact with their parent(s)
    ii) You are usually able to contact and work with their parent(s)

14. What challenges do you face in working with these children?
15. In your experience, how many children (%) in your setting who are separated from their parents identify a history of violence in their family (within the last 5 years)?
16. What differences do you observe between children staying in child care homes and those staying with parents?
17. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on these children in your organization?

Responding to the needs

18. Could you explain how you/the setting work to support children who are separated from their parents?
19. Has there been any in-service training provided by your employer in this area? If so, please specify.
20. How well did your training prepare you for responding to issues raised by children experiencing family breakdown and separation?
21. How does the setting ensure it meets the needs of these children?
22. How is your organization responding to the issues raised for these children by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Good practice

23. Are you able to share any examples of good practices from working with children facing parental separation?

24. Are there opportunities for children in your setting to

    i) Feedback and comment on their experiences

    ii) Raise any issues or complaints

    If so, how is this done?

Further developments

25. Are there any areas in relation to children facing parental separation that you would identify as needing further attention in terms of policy, practice, further training/research?
26. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your time and agreeing to take part in this study. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Appendix 2

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM

Exploring the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu: through practitioner's lens

Name of Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

(Nepali-speaker). Office telephone number: +9779851025933. Please note Dr Sue Kay-Flowers is currently moving office so any telephone enquiries should be directed to Ms Pradipta Kadambari

Please tick to confirm your understanding of the study and that you are happy for your organisation to take part in it.

I understand that by interviewing practitioners working in organisations in Kathmandu, this study aims to gain an understanding of children's experience of parental separation and that the research findings will be used to inform academic papers, online practice notes to be distributed across Nepal and an online international seminar to take place in 2021/22.

In agreeing to my organisation taking part in the study, I will approach employees who have experience of working with children separated from their parents, to see if they are willing to take part in the study and provide them with copies of the Participant Information Sheet, Participant Consent Form and Interview Schedule so they have information about the study and are able to decide for themselves whether they want to take part. I understand these forms will be sent to me on receipt of this completed form.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that participation of our organisation and members in the research is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect legal rights. ☐

3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential. ☐

4. I agree for our organisation and members to take part in the above study. ☐

5. I agree to conform to the data protection act ☐

Name of Gatekeeper: Date: Signature:

Appendix 3

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: Exploring the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu: through practitioner's lens

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty: Dr Sue Kay-Flowers, School of Education, APSS

Collaborating Institution: Kadambari Memorial College of Science and Management, Kathmandu, Nepal

1. What is the reason for this letter?

This letter is being sent to you to invite your organisation to take part in this study which aims to understand the experiences of children experiencing parental separation in Kathmandu by interviewing practitioners.

It is being sent to you as the Gatekeeper in order to provide information so that you can decide whether your organisation is willing to participate. It provides information about the study and you are asked to read through it carefully before making your decision. Should you have any questions, please contact the lead researchers, whose details are at the end of this sheet.

2. What is the purpose of the study?

Parental separation is an increasing issue affecting children in Nepal as a result of changing family relationships and migratory work patterns, yet the extent of parental separation and its impact on children in Nepal is unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests it impacts on children's development, their mental health and well-being, their education and employment. By interviewing practitioners working in NGOs and child welfare agencies in

Kathmandu, this study will gain an insight into the extent of the issue and an understanding the nature of children's experiences.

The study will use semi-structured interviews to explore practitioners' views on the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu. A copy of the questions to be used in the interview is attached to this email. The semi-structured interviews will take place online via Zoom due to the Covid pandemic. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient to the participant and your organisation. It is expected to take about 45 minutes. They will have the choice of the interview being conducted in English or Nepali.

3. What we are asking you to do?

We are asking you whether you would be willing for your organisation to take part in the study by allowing the research team to interview practitioners who work with children about their experiences of working with children who have experienced parental separation

If you are, you will be asked to approach employees in your organisation who have experience of working with children separated from their parents, to see if they are willing to take part in the study. You will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form and Interview Schedule to pass on to them to those who are interested in taking part so that they have information about what is involved in the study. The research team aims to recruit 2 practitioners from each organisation. If they are willing to participate they will be asked to complete, sign and date the Participant Consent form before any interviews can take place.

4. Why do we need access to your staff?

Your organisation works with children in Kathmandu, some of whom may have experienced parental separation. Therefore the practitioners will be well placed to talk about the experiences these children have and the issues it may raise.

5. If you are willing to assist in the study what happens next?

If you are willing, you are asked to complete, sign and date the Gatekeeper Consent form.

6. How we will use the Information?

The research findings will be shared with academics and practitioners through academic papers, online practice notes and an international online seminar in 2021/22 to which your organisation would be invited. In this way the data collected will be used to consider future developments that might enable practitioners to further support children and families in this situation.

7. Will the name of my organisation taking part in the study be kept confidential?'

We will use identifier codes in transcripts and reports to help protect the identity of individuals and organisations unless you tell us that you would like to be attributed to information. With your

consent, we would like to store your contact details so that we may contact you about future opportunities to participate in studies.

The Investigator will keep confidential anything they learn or observe related to illegal activity unless related to the abuse of children or vulnerable adults, money laundering or acts of terrorism. The investigator has a professional obligation to inform relevant agencies if they learn about certain exceptional circumstances where you or others may be at significant risk of harm. In this case the investigator may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first. Examples of those exceptional circumstances when confidential information may have to be disclosed are:

- The investigator believes you are at serious risk of harm, either from yourself or others
- The investigator suspects a child may be at risk of harm
- You pose a serious risk of harm to, or threaten or abuse others
- As a statutory requirement e.g. reporting certain infectious diseases
- Under a court order requiring the University to divulge information
- We are passed information relating to an act of terrorism

8. What will taking part involve? What should I do now?

- Sign and return the **Gatekeeper Consent Form** provided

If you are using the English version you are asked to return it to

Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

If you are using the Nepali version you are asked to return it to:

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

Should you have any comments or questions regarding this research, you may contact those leading the research team:

Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

(Nepali-speaker). Office telephone number: +9779851025933. Please note Dr Sue Kay-Flowers is currently moving office so any telephone enquiries should be directed to Ms Pradipta Kadambari

This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee (21/EDN/016 on 3 June 2021)

Contact Details of Lead Researcher:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with the researcher in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

Appendix 4

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Participant Information Sheet For practitioners

LJMU's Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: 21/EDN/016

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Exploring the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu: through practitioner's lens

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the study us being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

1. Who will conduct the study?

Study Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari, Principal, Kadambari Memorial College of Science and Management (KMC), Kathmandu, Nepal – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

(Nepali-speaker). Tel: +9779851025933. (Please note Dr Sue Kay-Flowers is currently moving office so any telephone enquiries should be directed to Ms Pradipta Kadambari)

Dr Nalini Lama, Research Coordinator at KMC – email address: nalini.lama@icloud.com Tel: +919635131736

Ms Yabesh Adhikari, Social Work Intern at KMC – email address: adhikariyabesh@gmail.com Tel: +9779860792017

Mr Tapashya Chapagain, Social Work Intern at KMC – email address: tapashya.chapagain@gmail.com Tel: +9779860318997

Ms Rupa K.C, Social Work Intern at KMC – email address: paruparai@gmail.com Tel: +9779810312769

Ms Simran Kunwar, Social Work Intern at KMC – email address: simran.2334.kunwar@gmail.com Tel: +9779860864073

School/Faculty within LJMU: Education/APSS

Collaborating Institutions: Kadambari Memorial College of Science and Management, Kathmandu, Nepal

2. What is the purpose of the study?

Parental separation is an increasing issue affecting children in Nepal as a result of changing family relationships and migratory work patterns, yet the extent of parental separation and its impact on children in Nepal is unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests it impacts on children's development, their mental health and well-being, their education and employment. By interviewing practitioners working in NGOs and child welfare agencies in Kathmandu, this study will gain an insight into the extent of the issue and an understanding the nature of children's experiences.

3. Why have I been invited to participate?

Along with a number of NGOs and child welfare agencies in Kathmandu, your organisation has agreed to take part in this study. You have been invited to participate because you are an employee and have experience of working with children separated from their parents. It is hoped that 2 employees from each organisation will take part in the study.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time by informing the investigators without giving a reason and without it affecting your rights.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

The study will use semi structured interviews to explore practitioners' views on the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu. A copy of the questions to be used in the interview is attached to this email. The semi structured interviews will take place online via Zoom due to the Covid pandemic. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you and your organisation. It is expected to take about 45 minutes. You will be interviewed by two researchers and have the choice of the interview being conducted in English or Nepali but will be asked to make your choice prior to the interview being scheduled.

If you are willing to take part in the study you are asked to Sign and return the **Participant Consent Form** provided

If you are using the English version you are asked to return it to

Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

If you are using the Nepali version you are asked to return it to:

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

6. **Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**
   The audio/video recording of the Zoom interview is essential to your participation but you should be comfortable with the recording process and you are free to stop the recording at any time. The audio/video recording of the interview will be used only for analysis.
   Interviews will be audio/video recorded using Zoom on a password protected computer. As soon as possible it will be transferred to secure storage, in the form of the PI's password protected LJMU computer. It will be deleted from the recording device as soon as the interview is transcribed into English, this will be done as soon as possible after the interview.

7. **Are there any possible disadvantages or risks from taking part?**
   No possible disadvantages or risks from taking part in this study have been identified. However it may be the focus on childhood experience of parental separation invokes an emotional response if you have been affected by parental separation in childhood. We have sought to minimise this risk in the questions we will ask and by providing a copy of the interview schedule with this information sheet so you are aware of the interview questions in advance. Should you become upset during the interview, the interview would be stopped and after a short break you would be asked whether you wanted to continue, to re-schedule the interview or end your participation in the study.
   If you are personally affected by participation in this study, you may wish to seek support/advice
   from:

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Nepal (TPO Nepal) which promotes psychosocial well-being and has a toll free helpline number. The following number is staffed from 8 am to 6 pm each day.
Tel: 1660-010-2005
Email address: tponepal@tponepal.org.np

Website:https://hes32-ctp.trendmicro.com:443/wis/clicktime/v1/query?url=http%3a%2f%2fwww.tponepal.org%2findroduction%2f&umid=709ba2a3-44fb-4986-98dd-7ced8a1d58a2&auth=768f192bba830b801fed4f40fb360f4d1374fa7c-f230235e799b5eec8cbb00a32f8034df48dab663

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, it is hoped that this work will enable the Principal Investigator and research team to gain insight into the extent of the issue, understand children's experiences and the issues they face. The research findings will be shared with academics and practitioners and will be used to consider future developments that might enable practitioners to further support children and families in this situation. In this way it will benefit future practitioners and service users.

9. What will happen to the data provided and how will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The information you provide as part of the study is the **study data**. Any study data from which you can be identified (e.g. from identifiers such as your name, date of birth, audio recording etc.), is known as **personal data**. This includes more sensitive categories of personal data (**sensitive data**) such as your race; ethnic origin; politics; religion; trade union membership; genetics; biometrics (where used for ID purposes); health; sex life; or sexual orientation. You can see the personal data we will collect in this study in the interview schedule.

When you agree to take part in a study, we will use your personal data in the ways needed to conduct and analyse the study and if necessary, to verify and defend, when required, the process and outcomes of the study. Personal data will be accessible to the research team. In addition, responsible members of Liverpool John Moores University, may be given access to personal data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure that the study is complying with applicable regulations.

When we do not need to use personal data, it will be deleted or identifiers will be removed. Personal data does not include data that cannot be identified to an individual (e.g. data collected anonymously or where identifiers have been removed). However, your consent form, contact details, audio/video recordings etc. will be retained for 5 years.

Personal data collected from you will be recorded using a linked code – the link from the code to your identity will be stored securely and separately from the coded data. You will not be identifiable in any ensuing reports or publications.

We will use identifier codes in transcripts and reports to help protect the identity of individuals and organisations unless you tell us that you would like to be attributed to information/direct quotes etc. With your consent, we would like to store your contact details so that we may contact you about future opportunities to participate in studies.

10. **Limits to confidentiality**

Please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed; for example, due to the position of the participant or information included in reports, participants might be indirectly identifiable in transcripts and reports. The investigator will work with the participant in an attempt to minimise and manage the potential for indirect identification of participants.

The Investigator will keep confidential anything they learn or observe related to illegal activity unless related to the abuse of children or vulnerable adults, money laundering or acts of terrorism. The investigator has a professional obligation to inform relevant agencies if they learn about certain exceptional circumstances where you or others may be at significant risk of harm. In this case the investigator may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first. Examples of those exceptional circumstances when confidential information may have to be disclosed are:

- The investigator believes you are at serious risk of harm, either from yourself or others
- The investigator suspects a child may be at risk of harm
- You pose a serious risk of harm to, or threaten or abuse others
- As a statutory requirement e.g. reporting certain infectious diseases
- Under a court order requiring the University to divulge information
- We are passed information relating to an act of terrorism

11. What will happen to the results of the study?

The research team intend to publish the findings in a set of online practice notes distributed to the participant organisations and NGOs and child welfare agencies across Nepal. Publication of two academic papers will also be sought in Open Access Journals. They will also be reported in an international online seminar for interested practitioners and academics that will take place in 2021/22. Participants will be invited to attend the seminar.

12. **Who is organising and funding the study?**

This study is organised and funded by Liverpool John Moores University. The funder is interested in gaining an insight into practitioners' understandings of the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu. There is no conflict of interest.

13. **Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 21/EDN/016).

14. What if something goes wrong?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact the Principal Investigator who will do their best to answer your query. The investigator should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact the chair of the Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk) and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

15. Data Protection Notice

Liverpool John Moores University is the sponsor for this study. We will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and will act as the data controller for this study. The research team has taken part in an online ethics workshop delivered by the PI to ensure a detailed and consistent understanding of the ethical considerations and management of data in this study.

This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. Liverpool John Moores University will process your personal data for the purpose of research. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest. Liverpool John Moores University will keep identifiable information about you for 5 years from the commencement of the study.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the study to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible.

You can find out more about how we use your information by contacting secretariat@ljmu.ac.uk.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact LJMU in the first instance at secretariat@ljmu.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/

16. Contact for further information

Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

(Nepali-speaker). Office telephone number: +9779851025933. Please note Dr Sue Kay-Flowers is currently moving office so any telephone enquiries should be directed to Ms Pradipta Kadambari

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering to take part in this study.

Appendix 5

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Exploring the experiences of children facing parental separation in Kathmandu: through practitioner's lens

LJMU's Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: **21/EDN/016**

Name of Principal Investigator:

Dr Sue Kay-Flowers – email address: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk

Contact person in Kathmandu: Ms Pradipta Kadambari – email address: pradiptakadambari@gmail.com

(Nepali-speaker). Office telephone number: +9779851025933. Please note Dr Sue Kay-Flowers is currently moving office so any telephone enquiries should be directed to Ms Pradipta Kadambari

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐

3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study (interview) ☐

5. I understand that the interview will be audio / video recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐

6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Participant Date Signature

Appendix 6

Interviewer codes and nature of their work

Interviewer Code	Nature of Organisation
001	Works with women and youth in marginalised communities
002	Works with women and youth in marginalised communities
003	Works with marginalised women to promote social entrepreneurship
004	Works with girls and women at risk of exploitation
005	Works with girls and women at risk of exploitation
006	Works with street children
007	Works with trafficking survivors
008	Works in child care home for orphans and homeless children
009	Works with children and families to promote children's rights
010	Works with children and families to promote children's rights
011	Works with female trafficking survivors
012	Works with street children
013	Works with children trafficked into orphanages
014	Works with children trafficked into orphanages
015	Works with female trafficking survivors
016	Works with marginalised women to promote social entrepreneurship
017	Works with girls living in vulnerable situations
018	Works with girls living in vulnerable situations
019	Works with trafficking survivors
020	Works with vulnerable children needing child protection

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For further information about this project Dr Susan Kay-Flowers can be contacted by email at: S.J.Kay-Flowers@ljmu.ac.uk