

# Learning from Children Exposed to Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation: The Bamboo Project Study on Child Resilience



## Resilience in Child Domestic Workers, Nepal

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This report was written in January 2014 by Helen Veitch, Milan Dharel and Rakshya Ojha as part of a series of reports comprising the Bamboo Project – a three-country learning initiative to understand resilience in children exposed to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, published together in May 2014 by Oak Foundation.

The symbol of Bamboo was adopted by Oak Foundation and the International Steering Committee as a symbol of resilience in children because in the face of adversity Bamboo bends, it does not break, and then it continues to grow. Similarly, children who show resilience continue to grow through adversity.

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# Glossary

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<b>Child Domestic Worker (CDW):</b>	Child domestic workers are persons below 18 years of age who do domestic work under an employment relationship. Children are paid or unpaid to work in households other than their own – carrying out tasks such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, gardening, collecting water, looking after other children and caring for the elderly.
<b>Employer:</b>	In this report use of the term ‘employer’ or employing family refers to the person with whom the child has an employment relationship. In many cases this is the female member of the employing family. Children in this study usually referred to their employers as ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle’.
<b>Sexual Abuse:</b>	Sexual abuse is used as a generic term referring to all forms of contact and non contact sexual abuse (as below).
<b>Sexual Assault (contact abuse):</b>	Refers to any involuntary sexual act in which a person is threatened, coerced, or forced to engage against their will, or any sexual touching of a person who has not consented (including rape).
<b>Non-contact Sexual Abuse:</b>	Refers to and includes an invitation to touch another in a sexual way, voyeurism, encouraging or forcing a child to masturbate or to watch others masturbate, indecent exposure (flashing) or showing genital areas, involving a child in the viewing or production of pornographic materials or in watching sexual activities; and encouraging a child to behave in sexually ways (e.g. simulating intercourse).
<b>Grooming:</b>	Refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity.

# Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings from an 18 month participatory research project in Nepal from 2012 to 2013 that looked at what can be learned from the life experience of children, adults, families and communities and programme practice that contributes to an understanding of resilience in the prevention of and recovery from child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Although there is no recognised definition of resilience, in the main, it is seen as the capacity to withstand considerable hardships, to bounce back in the face of great adversity, and to go on to live relatively normal lives (Gilgun, 1996) (Silva, 1996) (Turner et al., 1993) (Vanistendael, 1995).

In studying the resilience of children, two key methods were employed consisting of life story interviews and focus group discussions. Both methods are participatory in nature and allow children's own experience to be central to the analysis. In addition, the study was also participatory in that young people, as researchers and advisors were involved in all aspects of the research, from data collection, analysis and validation to dissemination of the findings.

Life story interviews were held with 47 children and focus group discussions with 70 children, involving a total of 117 children as research participants. All child participants were child domestic workers, in that they were currently or previously in paid or unpaid to work in households other than their own – carrying out tasks such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, gardening, collecting water, looking after other children and caring for the elderly. Child domestic workers were chosen as the sample group for this study because of identified links between the seclusion and dependency on employers of domestic workers that makes these children particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, notably sexual abuse.

From an analysis of the wellbeing of children interviewed in this research it can be concluded that, despite the fact that the vast majority of children had experienced some form of abuse in their lives, equally, a large majority of children in this study had positive outcomes and were *doing well*. Assessments highlighted two key indicators of wellbeing: firstly children's ability to reduce their feelings of fear, anxiety and anger and, secondly, children's progress in their studies (or in some cases simply their regular attendance of school).

The findings provide a rich description of the lives of child domestic workers in Nepal from which five themes were generated that highlight children's resilience.

## **Theme 1: Someone to confide in**

Children in this study showed a strong urge to share their problems with a 'confidante'; to offload their pain, to gain support and to help them develop a strategy to protect themselves from further harm. Children were particularly conscious of the need to confide in someone when it came to sexual abuse, consequently they made careful assessment of potential confidantes and the consequences of sharing a problem that could have a serious negative impact on their lives.

## **Theme 2: Dawn after Dusk: hope enables children to endure hardship**

Child domestic workers were found enduring hardship at their workplace in the hope of a better future, both for themselves and for their family. Children demonstrated that they were able to change their understanding of the difficulties they faced and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome, taking charge of their destiny by striving for their goals.

## **Theme 3: Positive attitude and self confidence**

Many children in this research displayed positive attitudes to themselves, to domestic work in general, and to the particular difficulties they faced. This positive outlook gave children confidence that they could influence or change the situations in which they found themselves.

## **Theme 4: Ability to assess risk and develop a protection strategy**

Many children in this study had the ability to assess situations where they were at risk of abuse or harm and to develop strategies to protect themselves and ensure their safety. Children demonstrated a keen ability to assess and navigate the power differentials between abuser and victim, domestic worker and employer.

## **Theme 5: Participation in festivals enables reconciliation**

Children's participation in cultural festivals can be a time of opportunity for child domestic workers; a moment of respite from the daily drudge of domestic work and a time when they can make the best of their situation. It also presents an opportunity for children to reconcile their difficulties with their employers, and has the potential to be a pivotal moment in their lives.

From the five themes three key conclusions have been drawn from this research, firstly that the five themes are interlinked, with many of the same resilience factors highlighted in each theme. Secondly, that despite an experience characterised by isolation, child domestic workers find support both externally from the limited number of people they are in touch with, and internally through their own resourcefulness. The third conclusion is that resilience factors were found to have a cause and effect relationship with each other, the existence of one resilience factor causing other factors to develop.



# 1. Background

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## Background to Nepal

Nepal lies between India and China, with a population of 26.5 million and a 1.35 per cent annual growth rate (CBS, 2012). Between 1980 and 2012 Nepal's Human Development Index rose by 3.8% annually from 0.234 to 0.463 today. This is below the regional average and, overall, gives the country a low human development ranking (UNDP, accessed 2013). The ratio of urban to rural population is 17% to 83% (CBS, 2012). Forty four per cent of Nepal's population live in poverty (UNDP, 2013). The overall literacy rate (for the population aged 5 years and above) has increased from 54.1 per cent in 2001 to 65.9 per cent in 2011 with the male literacy rate higher (75.1%) than the female (57.4%) (CBS, 2012).

The country has 10 main religions; the majority of people are Hindu (81.3%), followed by Buddhist (9%), Muslim (4.4%), Kirat (3.1%) and Christian (1.4%). There are 125 castes and ethnic groups recorded in Nepal and 123 different languages. These castes are not limited to the concept of Hindu classification but also have relevance to a number of ethnic communities, mostly indigenous groups such as Tharu, Madhesi, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Kirat, Limbu, Sherpa, Jhangad and Rajbanshi.

Until 1950, the country was ruled by the Rana dynasty, a combination of democracy and monarchy followed the Rana dynasty until communist rebellion in 1996. From this point, the country entered into a 12 year armed insurgency. During the period of the research, Nepal was under an electoral caretaker government led by a sitting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and former bureaucrats, with elections held in November 2013.<sup>1</sup>

The Hindu caste system permeates the culture of Nepal and classifies people into four main castes that are associated with working roles. Bramhin are considered to be the highest caste and are principally concerned with study, learning, performing religious rituals and education; Chhetri are considered to be brave and bold and are expected to take on positions of leadership; Viashya are considered to be trades people who maintain the business of society and Shudra are the labourers who take on all menial work. Caste influences children's lives in terms of the expectations placed on children, their roles, duties and interactions with other children and adults in Nepali society.

## The Status of Children and Childhood in Nepal

Approaching half of Nepal's population (44 per cent) are children aged under 18 (CBS, 2012). As there is very little research on the concept of childhood in Nepal, the cultural concept of childhood is presented in this research through the examination of socio-political and cultural structures and narratives.

**The legal concept of childhood:** the age of maturity in Nepal is 16 years old when citizenship can be obtained. The right to vote is granted at the age of 18 years. Historically, however, childhood has been defined in terms of the age of criminal liability (Bhatta, 2001) which is currently 10 years old

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<sup>1</sup> The country elected a constitution assembly in 2008 but the lack of political consensus over a new constitution resulted in the assembly's dissolution on 28 May 2012.

and appears to be based on a traditional Hindu concepts of childhood which promote the view that until children are 10 years old they are entitled to love, care and affection but thereafter need strict discipline and punishment. Traditionally, on reaching 16 years of age children become adults and should be treated as an equal. This coincides with cultural rites of passage for girls (marriage) and boys (a ritual called Upanayana where boys become adults). After these cultural rites of passage children are expected to behave as adults, to be responsible and not display “childish behaviour”.

**Social concepts of childhood:** similarly the social concepts of childhood are founded on the family's social economic status. A child of a rich family is generally considered to be innocent, immature, and incapable of hard labour; whereas a child from a poor family of the same age is considered to be responsible and capable enough to work and help their family. Caste has a significant impact on childhood with children of Brahmin families expected to be more interested in education from a young age than children from other castes who are expected to learn occupational skills and start working at a younger age.

**Gender:** There are strict gender divisions in Nepal between boys and girls with many cultural practices that discriminate against girls. For example, during menstruation girls are considered ‘untouchable’ by the rest of society but most particularly by men and boys, and their movements are restricted to the private domain. Parents often treat their sons preferentially, particularly in relation to property rights. As in the South Asia region more generally, girls are widely considered to be a financial burden. This view, together with persistent poverty, results in a high numbers of girls being pushed into child labour to support family incomes. Furthermore, perceptions of girls as ‘delicate’ and ‘obedient’, and societal expectations of girls as ‘responsible’ place considerable constraints on their behaviour – particularly outside the home.

**Family:** In general, the needs of the family in Nepal, overtake the individual needs of children. Children are considered as economic resources for the family, and after the father, the eldest boy is typically viewed as the head of the family. Eldest boys are therefore prepared for this responsibility during their childhood, and are expected to learn about family culture and practices so that they can promote these traditions to the next generation. Boys are also expected to contribute to their family's economy. However, in light of the poverty afflicting many Nepalese families, girls have now been incorporated into this tradition.

**Innocence and duty:** Childhood in Nepal is often correlated with innocence, children are considered inherently in need of protection, care, disciplinary action and parenting. Conversely children in Nepal are accorded with a number of responsibilities and duties to their family and to society that depend on their age, sex and caste.

**Education:** schooling is a particularly important part of all Nepali children's lives. The government's emphasis on social development in recent years has focused heavily on development of the education sector. As a result, child literacy has grown significantly in last few years with the government focusing on increasing the number of girls in school. The government has initiated educational programmes specifically targeting disadvantaged communities and children with disabilities. These programmes have played an important role in the increased enrolment of children in educational institutions, school enrolment in Nepal was reported at 11.88 % in 2011 according to a World Bank report of 2012.

## Challenges facing children in Nepal

Children in Nepal have felt the brunt of a decade of conflict. The Maoist insurgency, which started in 1996, has caused widespread violence throughout the country, resulting in the deaths of over 13,000 people including hundreds of children; with thousands more children traumatised by the loss of their parents or relatives. Exploitation of children and other violations of their rights were commonplace during the conflict, including physical, mental and sexual abuse, as well as torture and harassment. Due to ongoing political instability since the conflict ended, the state has been unable to adequately enforce legislation to protect children from abuse and exploitation.

The intensification of more than a decade of armed conflict in rural areas, coupled with the national decline in agricultural productivity and growth, has led to rapid urbanization. The lack of employment opportunities in urban centres, where the labour force has increased substantially,<sup>2</sup> has forced many people into domestic work as a survival strategy (Gautam & Prasan, 2011). Large numbers of children in Nepal (12.6 million) are living in absolute poverty without access to their basic needs such as food and shelter – an important factor pushing them to migrate from their rural homes to work on the streets or as child domestic workers (UNICEF, 2010).

Although a report by the Department of Education (2012) shows that the primary school enrolment ratio in Nepal is 95.1 per cent; it also highlights a high dropout rate of over 75% of children. The reasons for this drop-out rate give a good indication of the primary activities Nepalese children are engaged in; children who are not going to school are either working or they have family responsibilities (including early marriage). A report by the Central Bureau of Statistics on child labour (2012) indicates that 1.6 million children in Nepal are engaged in child labour with more than 127 thousand children working in hazardous forms of labour despite national legislation protecting children under the age of 18 from hazardous work. In addition, the population census of 2012 indicates that 1.36 % of households are headed by children aged up to 19 years. This translates into over 73,000 households headed by children (aged 10-19). Early marriage is also high in Nepal with 60% of the total married population reporting that their age on entering marriage was under 19 years of age.

**Sexual abuse and exploitation:** It is taboo in Nepal to talk about sex, sexuality and sexual issues, consequently child sexual abuse or any matters related to children and sex is considered an embarrassment, shameful and an unacceptable topic of conversation. Children are expected to obey their elders no matter what they demand, which places them in a powerless situation. For example, in a situation where an adult abuses a child, the child can neither directly oppose the offensive behaviour, nor share his/her problem with others (Gautam & Dharel, 2005). In Nepal, cases of child sexual abuse have been reported in homes, at workplaces, and in schools – places where unequal power relations based on class, caste, gender, ethnicity and religion are particularly strong (Dharel, 2012). In general, victims of child sexual abuse are subject to high levels of stigmatisation and are generally treated with suspicion by society, this discourages many children in reporting sexual abuse to the authorities or even discussing it with friends.

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<sup>2</sup> The working age population (aged 15 to 59 years) has increased from 54 percent (12,310,968) in 2001 to about 57 Percent (15,091,848) in 2011 (Centre Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

## Child domestic workers in Nepal

Domestic work has existed for centuries in Asia and is generally to be considered of no or low value, predominantly carried out by children and women from marginalized communities (GEFONT, 2007). Child domestic workers in Nepal are described as children who work in another person's house with or without payment. Nepal has an estimated 162,000 domestic workers of which more than 60 per cent are children (Gautam & Prasan, 2011). Kathmandu alone has approximately 21,000 child domestic workers, suggesting that more than one in twenty Kathmandu households has a child domestic worker (Dharel, 2009). A CWISH study in 2005 identified that 56 per cent of child domestic workers have suffered sexual abuse with 28 per cent experiencing sexual assault (Gautam & Dharel, 2005).

In a recent study with child domestic workers in Kathmandu, 95% of children stated that they were pushed into domestic work due to poverty, with 54.6% stating domestic violence as an additional trigger (CWISH, 2012). The main 'pull' factor is predominantly better access to education (32%) with 11% of children stating that they were attracted to city life.<sup>3</sup> Only 45% of children received a salary of over 1000 rupees (US \$15) a month. It was found that 40% of children worked between four and six hours a day, with around 18% reporting they had to work eight to ten hours a day. The majority of children, 63%, were paid their salary directly by their employers and 26% reported that their parents were paid their salary (Dharel, 2009). Studies reveal that, on average, child domestic workers' wages are five times less than those of adult domestic workers. In addition to their low cost, children were reported to be preferred because they tend not to complain and are easier to manipulate, intimidate and exploit (CWISH, 2005).

Generally, in Nepalese society, female members of the household are responsible for household chores, consequently it is more commonly a female employer that supervises and has most contact with child domestic workers. The Hindu caste system is particularly relevant to domestic work because of the concept and practice of 'untouchability'. The Dalit caste is considered untouchable and many families will not employ a Dalit domestic worker as, even to touch the same plate, cup or saucer that a person from the Dalit caste has touched, is deemed unacceptable. Children in domestic work roughly follow the patterns of adults in domestic work regarding caste, consequently the majority of children (55%) in domestic work are from the Janajati Caste and only two per cent Dalit. Chheteri account for 13.2% and Brahmin 11.3%. Typically, however, many child domestic workers are from indigenous communities (55.6%) (Gautam & Prasan, 2011).

## Violence and abuse against child domestic workers in Nepal

Children in domestic work are considered highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because of their confinement, invisibility and lack of access to family support and protection services. In a survey of 305 children by CWISH the sexual abuse of child domestic workers was reported as evenly split between girls and boys with contact abuse more common (57%) than non-contact abuse (43%) and marginally more out-of-school children (54%) reporting abuse than school-going children. Child domestic workers reported that over 80% of their abusers were men and 60% of children rated 'lonely places' as the location where they were most vulnerable to sexual abuse (CWISH, 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> It is commonly perceived that the only opportunities for good quality education are in urban areas.

## **Child Domestic Work: The Global Picture**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 17.2 million children around the world involved in domestic work, equivalent to six and a half per cent of all working children. Two thirds of these children are girls. (International Labour Organisation, 2013). While recent statistics show that child labour numbers in general are down, quite considerably in some cases, there has been no decrease in the number of children in domestic work.

For many child domestic workers, their position and working conditions represent a threat to their health and/or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Child domestic workers are often hard to support not only because they toil behind the closed doors of their employers' homes, but also because societies see what they do, not as work but more as filial duty, and – particularly in relation to girls – important training for later life as wives and mothers. (ILO, 2013)

Child domestic work warrants particular attention because of the conditions under which the children are working. Children 'living-in' with their employers are particularly isolated and vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Their situation, and how they got to be there, also makes them highly dependent on their employers for their basic needs, and at times results in physical, psychological and sexual violence (Blagbrough, 2008). Child domestic workers are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation not only because they are children, and especially girls, but also because they are working in people's homes without being recognised as workers.

More generally, and despite its necessity in all societies, domestic work remains consistently undervalued and poorly regulated, and domestic workers of all ages continue to be overworked, underpaid and unprotected (ILO, 2010). At the same time, the significant contribution of domestic workers to local, national and global economies is now firmly established, underlining that across the world domestic work is an important source of employment, particularly for millions of women as well as adolescents above the minimum age for admission to work. It is also evident that both the demand for, and the numbers of, domestic workers of all ages is growing (ILO, 2013).

While the prevailing view remains that the practice is predominantly a 'child labour' issue, a growing number of studies have been looking beyond this analysis to examine the issue as a gender-based social phenomenon with links to a range of other child rights concerns, including the growing commercialisation of traditional upbringing practices, sexual abuse, child marriage and the movement of children (Black, 2011).

## **Violence and abuse against child domestic workers**

Child domestic workers' isolated situation and indistinct role in the employers' household make them particularly vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuse. If violence does occur, children's dependency on their employers for basic needs, their sense of duty to parents to make the situation work out, or their fear of the consequences of speaking up make child domestic workers particularly unlikely to report abuse (Blagbrough, 2010). Regular violence or its threat routinely leads to a loss of self-esteem and a self-perpetuating cycle of abuse develops, resulting in abused child domestic workers (amongst other girls in a similar position) feeling unable to challenge the situation (Pinheiro, 2006).

There are broad similarities with regard to the incidence and range of violence against child domestic workers, although differences exist in local manifestations of violent behaviour towards

these children. For example, in some countries research has indicated that girls tend to suffer more from verbal bullying and boys more from physical violence. Commonly, child domestic workers experience various kinds of violence.

Sexual violence towards child domestic workers, due to the child's vulnerability and isolation, is relatively common. The risk of abuse and harassment is greatest among those who live-in, and who are therefore present in the household all the time. (ILO, 2012). In West Bengal (India) a study indicated that a third of child domestic workers had their private parts touched by members of their employing family and 20 per cent had been forced to have sexual intercourse (Save the Children UK, 2006). In El Salvador, an ILO study showed that more than 15 per cent of child domestic workers who had changed their employers had done so because of sexual harassment or abuse (Godoy, 2002).

In a recent study looking at the psycho-social impact of domestic work on children in six countries by Anti-Slavery International (2013), it is worth looking more closely at the findings regarding child domestic workers in India as their situation is comparable to children's experiences in Nepal.<sup>4</sup> The study found that 24 per cent of child domestic workers reported knowing of a child domestic worker who had been sexually abused compared to only 1 per cent of a control group.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, nearly a quarter of child domestic workers from India were physically punished by their employers and while 50 per cent of the control group felt 'proud of themselves', only 23 per cent of child domestic workers felt the same way; both the control group in India and child domestic workers in India performed badly in terms of psychosocial well-being (Anti-Slavery International, 2013).

There is also a link between child domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation. In a 2002 study it was established, for example, that more than a quarter of girls being commercially sexually exploited in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) were former child domestic workers – many of whom were sexually abused by members of the family they were working for (Mwakitwange, 2002). Similar findings have been reported in El Salvador (Godoy, 2002). In cases where girls become pregnant, they are often thrown out of the house and forced to fend for themselves on the streets, as the shame of being an unmarried mother makes it difficult for them to return home. Many families reject these 'spoiled girls' because their behaviour has brought dishonour to the family. In these instances, domestic work typically becomes a precursor to prostitution, as those concerned have few other available options (UNICEF-ICDC, 1999).

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<sup>4</sup> Other research sites in the study were Costa Rica, Peru, Togo, Tanzania and the Philippines.

<sup>5</sup> For ethical reasons children were asked indirectly whether they 'knew of someone' who had been sexually abused and it was assumed that children would refer to themselves or others in their answers.

## 2. Statement of Objectives

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The overall aim of the study was to explore the relevance of resilience in stimulating and supporting new thinking and new approaches towards understanding and addressing the issue of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. It is hoped this will lead to new policy and practice that responds, not only to the needs of the children but builds on their experience and knowledge and the experience of their families and communities.

### Research Questions

The child abuse programme of Oak Foundation has developed a learning initiative to determine ‘what may be learned from the life experience of children, adults, families and communities and programme practice that contributes to an understanding of resilience in the prevention of and recovery from child sexual abuse and exploitation?’

In order to answer this overall learning question the following research questions were drafted for this study. These questions were refined during the initial three months of the project in consultation with the research team:

1. What are the resilience factors in child domestic workers’ lives in relation to their experience of adverse situations especially sexual abuse, violence and exploitation?
2. How can children’s resilience be incorporated into policies and practices that address these difficult situations, including the sexual abuse and exploitation of child domestic workers?

### The Study in Nepal

This study is a collaborative effort between Children Unite and the Children and Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH). Children Unite works internationally to protect child domestic workers from exploitation and abuse and to promote their rights, working in partnership with local organisations that directly support child domestic workers. CWISH is a Nepali human rights organization working in the field of children, youth and women. CWISH works on child protection issues primarily with child domestic workers, children who have been sexually abused and children without parental care.

### The Focus on Child Domestic Workers

The Bamboo project seeks to explore and better understand resilience in prevention of and recovery from child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation through listening to children and learning about their life experiences. The study has taken place in three countries and within them, in locations or communities judged as being at high risk for the occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Bamboo project is part of a wider initiative by Oak Foundation, that seeks to stimulate and support new thinking and new approaches to the needs of children and young people exposed to or recovering from sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Bamboo project is designed in two phases. The first involves direct research with groups of children in three countries: Ethiopia, Bulgaria and Nepal. In each country, populations of children vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation have been identified. Within each population and within the groups of children who agreed to participate in the research, some children had been able to avoid or prevent the abuse, others had been sexually abused or exploited but had “recovered” or were doing well, while others who had experienced such abuse appeared not to be doing well in many facets of their lives.

The Bamboo project explores, from the perspective of children, (and their families and immediate community), what factors helped some children to prevent or recover from sexual abuse and exploitation, while others were unable to do so. Identifying vulnerable populations raised different concerns or challenges in each context. Bulgaria and Ethiopia were selected as sites because both are countries of focus for Oak Foundation’s Child Abuse Programme, with an extensive history of partnership between the Foundation and practice agencies with expertise and experience of working with children who have been sexually abused or exploited. A third site was identified through consultation with some of the Oak partners working internationally. This process resulted in the Foundation and the International Steering Committee deciding that the third site for research would be with children engaged in domestic work. The decision was based on the vulnerability of child domestic workers to abuse and exploitation, which had been confirmed by research undertaken by one of Oak Foundation’s partners, Anti Slavery International. This research highlighted that the seclusion and dependency on employers makes child domestic workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and in fact, this routinely results in physical, psychological and sexual violence.

Children Unite, an international non-governmental organisation working to protect the rights of child domestic workers, was selected as the lead partner. Their proposal outlined the potential for work in Nepal, and the availability of good partners locally.



# 3. Literature Review

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## **The Changing Concept of Childhood**

The 'common' and long held view of childhood sees children as immature, incompetent beings that develop in stages to become mature and competent adults (Mayall, 2004). It depicts children as passive, empty vessels who learn social norms from adults in their family and at school and is based on development psychology and socialisation theory. Childhood is viewed as 'preparation' for adulthood, and tends to ignore the present tense of children's lives, choosing instead to focus on children's future.

## **The Sociology of Childhood as a Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used in this study is the sociology of childhood, an emergent paradigm that challenges the childhood presented by development psychology and functionalist sociology. Sociology of Childhood understands childhood as a social construction (James & Prout, 1997) and incorporates children's agency and competence as a prerequisite for studying children. This new paradigm has a number of key features outlined in James and Prouts' seminal book 'Constructing and Re-Constructing Childhood' (1997:8-9). The first is that childhood is a social construction. As such it 'provides an interpretative frame for contextualising the early years of human life'. Second is that there is not one universal childhood but a variety of childhoods both cross-culturally and historically, in terms of gender, class or ethnicity. Third is that 'children's social relationships are worthy of study in their own right' and fourth, that 'children are active in the construction and determination of their own social lives'. Consequently the fifth characteristic promotes the use of methods to study childhood that allow children a more direct voice. This last characteristic concerns the need for protagonists of the paradigm to 'engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society'.

In this changing concept of childhood, more emphasis is placed on children's agency and children are understood as agents in their own learning (Mayall, 2004). Instead of being viewed as vulnerable, incompetent and dependent on adults, children are seen as competent from an early age; possessing knowledge of what matters to them, they are able to make assessments on their own lives, the lives of those around them and are able to influence their environment. However, it is also recognised that children's agency and competence is constrained by structural factors (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). In the context of child domestic workers lives, for example, these structural factors could be the cultural practices that push children, particularly girls, into domestic work in the first place; domestic work being seen as 'safe' for girls and good training for their future role as wife and mother (ILO, 2013).

The growth of the children's rights movement and, in particular, the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 has been viewed as a key enabling factor in the emergence of new concepts of childhood (Mayall, 2004). The UNCRC was lauded as 'a landmark in efforts on behalf of children' (Cantwell, 1992) and was the first piece of international law to explicitly acknowledge children's rights, in particular children's participation rights. The articles in the convention are commonly split into the 'Three Ps: protection, provision and participation', with

participative rights representing the most controversial and challenging of the three – breaking from a tradition that restricts children's rights to services and protection. The participative rights outlined in the UNCRC highlight the issue of children's agency – a key concept in the re-conceptualisation of childhood.

The concept of children's agency, defined as 'the capacity to act' (Giddens, 1984) allows children to be viewed as competent but equally it highlights the social structures that inhibit agency: the connection between 'action and power'. There have been many attempts to explore the agency of children that recognise children's position of powerlessness in relation to adults (Morrow, 2003). Agency is linked to the powers (or lack of them) that children possess to 'influence, organise, coordinate and control events taking place in their everyday worlds' (Alanen, 2001) – even when the everyday world, such as that of a child domestic worker, is characterised by exploitation. By focusing on children's competence and agency instead of their vulnerabilities and dependency, the concept of resilience has mirrored this paradigm shift in thinking about childhood in the last 25 years.

## Defining Resilience

Resilience is a term that is increasingly used in psychosocial research and interventions with children and by academics affiliated with the 'sociology of childhood' paradigm and children's rights. Notably, Jo Boyden has forcefully argued for a paradigmatic shift in thinking about childhood and child development theory where children are 'agents of their own development who, even during times of great adversity, consciously act upon and influence the environments in which they live.' (Boyden, 2003)

However there is no agreement on the definition of resilience. Resilience was first studied in the 1980s and 1990s in terms of maltreated children and in efforts to understand how psychiatry and other health professions could support adults who, as children, had suffered severe adversity. (J, Taylor, & Asmundson, 2006). For example, in 1997, Lynskey and Fergusson highlighted protective factors found in adults that combated psychiatric disturbances from their experience of sexual abuse in childhood (in Morale, 2007). This research focused on the 'protective forces' or 'positive adaptation' of resilient children (Garmezy et al., 1984, Masten et al., 1988, and Rutter, 1987 in Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Researchers focused on that which differentiated children who were well adjusted (despite adversity) from those who were not. Resilience was understood as successful adaptation, positive functioning and competence in the face of severe trauma or chronic stress (Luthar, 1993) (Egeland, Pianta, & O'Brien, 1993). Studies on resilience looked at the personal qualities of resilient children (such as high self esteem or autonomy) (Masten & Garmezy, 1985 in Luthar et al., 2000) but it was soon recognised that external factors were also relevant when the idea of 'growth' in the face of adversity was introduced (Gordon, 1995). These external factors included aspects of the children's families and the wider social environment such as the existence of close relationships with supportive adults at home or school. Consequently much resilience research has focused on understanding these underlying protective processes or 'positive adaptations' to adversity.

This focus of resilience research on the 'positive adaptations' of children rather than their vulnerabilities has been the crux of the paradigm shift in thinking about childhood. Previously research had focused on a 'deficit model' of children as vulnerable and weak, with most studies

revolving around disorders, risks, problems or illnesses of the child or his/her situation (University of Philippines, 2002). In contrast, resilience research views children as competent and focuses on their positive adaptations – how children succeed despite adversity.

Morale's review of resilience literature highlights different factors contributing to resilience that were particularly pertinent to theme development in this study (Morale, 2007). Personality factors such as self-organisation; the ability to make use of personal tendencies to recover when faced with adversity. Self-esteem: recognition by an individual of personal competences. Personal effectiveness: an individual's belief in their inherent capabilities to achieve a given objective. Morale states that extraversion (the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others) and 'conscientiousness' (the tendency to demonstrate self-discipline) have a strong positive correlation with resilience.

Cognitive factors of resilience focus on coping strategies such as 'seeking emotional support and disclosure towards a third person' (Morale: 8) and cognitive re-framing whereby an individual is able to change their understanding of a traumatic event and its implications (Spaccarelli, 1994). Another important cognitive factor is aptitude: the ability to understand and analyse and a capacity for attention and concentration. And finally, different types of optimism have been shown to be significant in reducing the effect of stress and consequently linked to resilience.

Familial factors have a significant impact on children as the family is the first social group to which a child belongs, particularly the support of parents and the creation of a warm emotional climate within the family environment that children can draw on in the future. With societal and cultural factors studies have placed emphasis on the membership of social groups, the support of peers and the adherence to the social norms or moral rules of a social group. There is also recognition of the differences in culture and the likelihood of the collective experience being valued over the individual experience in Asian cultures. Gender and age also play their part. Girls have been found to be more resilient than boys in adolescence (Dumont, Widom et al. 2007:15 in Morale, 2007). And girls are more likely than boys to use resilience factors associated with seeking social support (Somchit and Sriyaporn 2004:40 in Morale, 2007). Finally, in Morale's study spirituality was highlighted as an influencing factor in seeking to dispel depression or negative emotions (by petitioning God) and in an individual's feeling of connection to a supreme being and a higher goal. (Jaramillo-Velez, Ospina-Munoz et al. 2005).

Gilligan's work on 'turning points' has significant connections to resilience and was also pertinent to the analysis and generation of themes for this study (Gilligan, 2009). Gilligan argues that turning points may arise from events that may take place by chance in a person's life but it is the person's agency that is crucial in how they respond to these events and that make them a pivotal moment or turning point. 'Sometimes highly visible, at other times apparently innocuous, such moments may prove important in opening up new possibilities, often in what may otherwise be unpromising circumstances.' (Gilligan: 31) He suggests that understanding these turning points is key to understanding developmental change and puts forward four conditions that need to be fulfilled: the opportunity, the readiness of the person to grasp it, the agency of the person to take active steps to respond to the opportunity, and a sustaining context which supports the change effort and adherence to the new pathway (Gilligan: 31).

In summary, most definitions see resilience as the capacity to withstand considerable hardships, to bounce back in the face of great adversity, and to go on to live relatively normal lives (Gilgun, 1996) (Silva, 1996) (Turner et al., 1993) (Vanistendael, 1995). Some studies take this a step further, seeing resilience as more transformative: 'The human capacity to face, overcome and be strengthened or even be transformed by the adversities of life' (Grothberg, 1995).

This study has also used a definition of resilience based on discussions within Oak Foundation (Bruce & MacDonald, 2007) where, although no consensus was reached, a number of definitions were discussed and offered (Fozzard, 2002), (Vanistendael, 2007), (Gordon, 1995), (Grotberg, 1997). Some of the characteristics of resilience are as follows:

- Resilience encompasses growth as well as resistance and coping in the face of adversity;
- It is a long-term process, or a life path;
- It may need adversity to develop. Hence the phrase 'in the face of adversity' rather than 'in spite of adversity';
- A resilient child copes with adversity better than he or she should;
- Resilience should be seen as a process of interaction with the environment, not an inherent quality in the child;
- It needs more than positive qualities or resources – actively using the resources is required;
- It may be seen in individuals or in the group environment; and
- It is never absolute, but varies with circumstances, with time, and from person to person.

## Sociology of Childhood and Resilience

As this research uses the Sociology of Childhood as its theoretical framework and most research on resilience derives from the field of development psychology, it is worth exploring the links between the concept of resilience and this emergent paradigm. Key concepts appear to be children's agency, children's competence and the importance of social context.

**Children's agency:** children's agency has been connected to the concept of resilience through studies into 'advocacy as a causal factor in promoting resilience' (Grover, 2005). Grover gives an example of Guatemalan street children who testify as witnesses (of police brutality) for other child victims and states that this self-advocacy by children can lead to them 'shedding rather than assuming the mantle of 'victim'' (Grover, 2005) and thus promotes resilience in children facing great adversity.

**Children's competence:** many proponents of resilience link the term 'positive adaptation' to children's social competence (Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) (Grover, 2005) (Bartley, 2006). Although resilient behaviour engaged in by highly vulnerable children may be behaviour that is not always socially acceptable – as proved the case in one study of street children in Bombay (Kombarkan, 2004). This study concluded that the substance abuse of street children was a maladaptive strategy for coping with the stress of living on the streets. However, when this apparently high-risk behaviour was re-examined from the children's view it showed that substance abuse enabled children to maintain a relationship with one of the most important groups for ensuring their survival on the streets – the network of other street children (Grover, 2005).

**Social context:** Grover's example above illustrates the importance of the social context for research on resilience and that children's competence is defined differently, depending on this context. Some societies highly value passiveness or conversely aggressiveness. Children are perceived as well adjusted if they display characteristics that fit with these norms – 'displaying' these characteristics may even be a strategy of the socially competent child to avoid harm. This may be particularly pertinent when looking at sub-cultures (such as the gang culture of street children) that are very often in contradiction to the dominant culture. In this study on child domestic work, for example, the 'subservience' expected of a child domestic worker, combined with a general expectation of children in Nepal to be obedient and quiet (particularly girls) is likely to be a cultural context that has a bearing on children's competence.

## Research Methods for Studying Resilience

Early research on resilience focused on quantitative methods (in particular statistical analysis using multiple indices of risk) where long lists of adversities such as poor parenting, poverty, abuse or mental illness were produced (Luthar, 1993, Fergusson and Lynskey, 1996, in Bautista et al. 2001). This kind of research, which ignores children's perspectives, has been criticised as unlikely to be able to predict the impact of children's exposure to adversity (Boyden, 2003). More recent research on resilience has used child-centred approaches that focus on how children understand and experience adversity. It highlights power and status differences and often uses research methods that allow children to add their own meanings of childhood. However, research on resilience, even when child-centred and action-orientated and framed within a rights context, still tends to assume that children share the same understanding of risk as adults (Boyden & Mann, 2000) and focuses on adults' responsibilities towards children in terms of protection.

Research findings tend to include recommendations for many different kinds of prevention strategies and some have been criticized as leading to practice that disempowers children – seeing them as passive victims (Kitzinger, 1997). Indeed many of the 'adversities' experienced by children (especially sexual and physical abuse) are due to structural power imbalances, such as patriarchy, and resilience theory tends not to challenge these structural issues. The focus is generally on individual children who face specific adversities, a fact only recognised by more enlightened researchers: 'We should not mistake resilience for a substitute of social change' (University of Philippines, 2002).

## 4. Methods

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This study uses participatory children-focused research methods to collate and analyse data and consequently aligns with one of the key features of the Sociology of Children in that it 'promotes the use of methods to study childhood that allow children a more direct voice' (Prout & James, 1997). Research that is based on children's rather than adults' views of childhood has led to much empirical data on all aspects of children's lives (Mayall, 2004) ranging from children's views and understanding of their lives at home and school to the experience of being a refugee, being sexually abused or coping with the death of a parent. A variety of different methods for research with children that respects their ability to comment on their own lives have consequently been developed over time (Christensen & James, 2000), (Kellet et al., 2004) as well as ethical considerations for studying children (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). This includes participatory research by children on their own lives. The plethora of research that outlines the competencies of children in their everyday lives has revealed a picture of childhood that is a 'dynamic arena of social activity involving struggles for power, contested meanings and negotiated relationships' (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998).

### Undertaking Child-Focused Research

#### What do we mean by child-focused research?

Child focused research tries to identify the problems and issues of children, analyse these issues and seek recommendations on how to address these issues from the point of view of the child. In the same way this study uses participatory methods to identify resilience factors for child domestic workers, and consequently, falls under the banner of child-focused research.

Working with children requires methodologies that facilitate trust and an atmosphere where children feel relaxed and comfortable. The methodologies also need to be creative as play, art, and role-play help children express themselves as well as create new relationships with other children and adults. Structured activities that employ art, play, and theatre arts are often used in psychosocial support as they help facilitate recovery. These methodologies help in meaning construction, facilitating sharing of feelings and opinions, establishing trust and processing experiences. They help children to look forward and plan, and "get to know new friends" – as the children often say. In a study where children are sources of data, creative methods help children focus on topics related to the research questions; creative methods are less intimidating for children than more traditional academic research methods.

#### Participatory research

Participatory research methods are a relatively new concept, promoted in research on and with children as a tool to explain the culture of childhood and children's social relationships. (Prout & James, 1997) (Mayall, 2004).

Participatory research is when the people whose lives are being studied are involved in collecting and analysing the data (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). In reality very little research is genuinely 'participatory' because the researchers usually set the main questions. In this study, although the

main research question was developed by adults (as part of the Bamboo Initiative) two sub-questions were developed by researchers and two of these researchers were young people.

In total there were five participatory elements to the research as follows:

1. Two of the researchers were young people (aged under 25, both of whom are former child domestic workers) who undertook focus group discussions with research participants, with one young researcher involved in all levels of analysis (coding, categorisation and theme development);
2. Participatory techniques were used in both life story interviews and focus group discussions with research participants;
3. A Children's Advisory Group was set up for the study and consulted throughout;
4. Children (research participants) were involved in validating the initial findings from the research; and
5. A film was produced by children to explain the key findings from the research to other local children.

### **Action-orientated research**

This research has been designed to be action-orientated in that its intended result is to influence practice (Ennew & Plateau, 2004), in particular, the practice of those working with child domestic workers in Nepal. This has been achieved through consultation with a stakeholder group (a national advisory board of professionals from the child welfare and rights field in Nepal) and a children's advisory board (of child domestic workers). In addition all researchers are employed by children's rights practitioners (CWISH or a similar child rights NGO).

### **Research Rationale**

Quantitative research methods have commonly been used to study resilience, however, this study used qualitative methods of life story interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Life story interviews were informal but structured and used creative methods (drawing) to allow children to feel comfortable in telling their story. Life story interviews have been shown to successfully capture personal meanings and interpretations (Bautista et al. 2001) and allow informants to set the pace and create their own conceptual framework (Gilgun, 1996). Structured activities during the interview serve as jump off points to discuss different topics so that the narrative can flow to other themes naturally. The objective of a life story interview is to acquire personal information and experiences to be used for research purposes. Towards this end, the interviewer has an "interactive relationship" with the interviewee to gain truthful information.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen for this study because they reduce the role and power of adult researchers and enable groups of children to feel more comfortable (Ennew & Hastedewi, 2004). The power differentials in this research method were further counteracted by the use of young researchers from a similar background (former child domestic workers) as lead facilitators for FGDs. In addition, the use of structured activities with small groups of children has been shown to allow children to talk more easily about their daily lives than interviews or surveys.

The following typology (Grotberg, 1998) was used in the development of questions for life story interviews and focus group discussions, which incorporates key factors, or domains of resilience.



This typology has been used by Non Government Organisations working in the field of children's rights and support services to help facilitate the flow of resilience among abused children, and in particular, enable children to participate in recovery and reintegration programmes (Save the Children Sweden, 2008).

In the typology Grotberg (1998) identifies three main factors or domains of resilience:

- 'I have' factors relate to the external support and resources that the environment provides to children;
- 'I am' domains concern the children's own personal strengths; traits, feelings, attitudes and beliefs that help develop personality and children's self concepts; and
- 'I can' factors are seen as children's interpersonal strengths, their feelings, attitudes or skills that are connected to increased competence in facing problems.

'I will' domains are sometimes added to the three factors above as they relate to children's willingness, capacity and commitment to engage in matters that affect their lives.

## Research Site

The research site for the study is Kathmandu Valley in Nepal and was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Kathmandu Valley has the largest population of child domestic workers among the cities of Nepal with more than 25 thousand children reported to be working in domestic service (Sharma, 2001) who have come from 55 districts of Nepal (Dharel, 2009) particularly from the neighbouring districts of Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap and Nuwakot. Secondly, as the research plan is to explore the experiences of child domestic workers facing severe hardship (adversity), it is known that almost half of children domestic workers in Kathmandu are not accessing education and one third have experienced sexual abuse at their workplace (Gautam & Dharel, 2005). Finally, the organisation managing the research project, CWISH, has a network of intervention and outreach programmes to access and support over 1000 child domestic workers in Kathmandu.

Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal and incorporates the three districts of Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, known collectively as Kathmandu Valley. The latest census report (2012) indicates that Kathmandu Valley is a highly urbanised and populated place. It is the district with the highest population density (4,416 people per square km); has the highest percentage of households living in rented house (58.65%), the fastest population growth rate (61.23 %); and also has the highest literacy rate (86.3 %).

## Ethical Strategy

The concept of research ethics is concerned with respecting research participants throughout the project, partly by using agreed standards. Ethics standards are also designed to protect researchers and their institutions as well as the good name of research (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

The ethics strategy for this study detailed the ethical issues that the research team were expecting to face during the course of the research project, outlining the key ethical issues and the research team's agreed response. Tools (such as consent forms etc.) needed to implement the strategy were included in the strategy.



The ethical strategy was used systematically throughout the study consequently ethical issues were addressed comprehensively – particularly in data collection where a trained counsellor was on-hand should children want support. In total, 43 children received support from CWISH during and after the research project (10 boys 33 girls), most taking up counselling services:

- 22 children were provided with counselling services after their interview (one also needed counselling during their interview but continued with the interview);
- 13 were provided with educational support;
- 2 girls were provided with hostel support (both were rescued as it was determined it was not safe for them to stay in their workplace);
- 3 children were provided with life-skill training (1 boy, 2 girls); and
- 7 children were repatriated back to their homes in the provinces.

## The Research Team

The research team comprised the following people:

**Lead Researcher**, Helen Veitch, (female) responsible for managing the research project, leading the research team and the main author of the research report, also responsible for reporting to Oak Foundation's International Steering Committee for the Bamboo Initiative. The Lead Researcher is also the Director of Children Unite, based in the UK.

**Lead National Researcher**, Milan Dharel, (male) responsible for managing the Nepali research team and leading them through all stages of the study, observed one focus group discussion and contributed to writing the research report. The Lead National Researcher was initially Director of CWISH, but during the course of the project, became an independent consultant, based in Nepal.

**Project Co-ordinator**, Rakshya Ojha, (female) responsible for co-ordinating the logistics of the study, involved in all stages of the research and contributed to writing the research report. The Project Co-ordinator is a member of the CWISH staff team and is based in Nepal.

**Six Researchers for Life Story Interviews**: six female school counsellors were recruited to undertake life story interviews for the study. One of the key strengths of using counsellors was that when children start to discuss personal issues such as abuse, counsellors have years of experience of handling this kind of situation, whereas general researchers do not. Also male researchers might find it more difficult for children to open up to them, as most Nepali children feel more comfortable to talk to women (although it was recognized that boys might have been more comfortable with a male researcher).

**Researcher's Co-ordinator**, Anita Tamarang (female), responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the other five researchers, in particular for identifying research participants. The Researcher's Co-ordinator also participated in data analysis.

**Two Young Researchers**, Ram Kumar Basnet (male) and Sonu Danuwar (female) were selected as lead facilitators for focus group discussions with children. Both Young Researchers are former child domestic workers and were aged under 25 for the duration of the research. Both have experience of

facilitating workshops with children and are in positions of youth leadership. Sonu Danuwar participated in all levels of analysis (coding, categorisation and theme development).

**One Co-Facilitator**, Susmita Hamal (female) was selected to support lead facilitators in focus group discussions with children and was also involved in data analysis.

Additionally one key informant interviewer (male) was selected to undertake and write-up key informant interviews.

**Consultant Researcher**, Faye Balanon, was commissioned to train and advise the research team on the research methods. The Consultant Researcher delivered three training workshops on data collection and analysis and advised the research team throughout the course of the project. The Consultant Researcher is the Program Officer at the Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (PST CRRC) and is based in the Philippines.

In addition, the research team was supported by an Advisor from Oak Foundation's International Steering Committee (ISC), Beth Protacio de Castro, who participated in two key workshops and advised by email for the duration of the project. The ISC Advisor to the research team is Director at PST CRRC and is based in the Philippines.

#### Training and support for the research team

Initial training of seven days was conducted by the Consultant Researcher, Lead Researcher and the ISC Adviser to the research team in January 2012. Training consisted of an introduction to the innovative research methods and analysis being utilised in the study and included testing of life story interview and focus group discussion techniques for all researchers.

Training was also conducted by the Consultant Researcher in data analysis and theme development to the Lead Researcher, National Lead Researcher and Project Co-ordinator in November 2012 and May 2013.

During the course of the research the research team met regularly to reflect, learn and feedback their experiences with each other. Researchers undertaking life story interviews met after each 'day camp' of life story interviews. The National Lead Researcher and the Project Co-ordinator conducted regular reviews and mentoring of all researchers and facilitators of focus group discussions and life story interviews.

## The Sample Group

**Restrictions in sampling:** the initial concept for the sampling in this study was to target child domestic workers who had been sexually abused and had 'recovered well' or who had 'not recovered well'. This sampling was planned with the understanding that children with better resiliency will demonstrate a faster recovery from trauma and that children who are not recovering well will demonstrate lower resiliency. However, in consultation with practitioners working with child domestic workers it was concluded that a) sexual abuse is not usually a one-off traumatic event for child domestic workers but takes place over a period of time, sometimes without the child realising they are being abused, b) sexual abuse tends to take place alongside other abuses (physical and emotional abuse) so should be considered alongside these not separated out. Consequently,

although sampling targeted child domestic workers who had been sexually abused, this was interpreted broadly to mean child domestic workers who are or have faced difficulties (including sexual abuse).

In addition, practitioners stated that they cannot distinguish between 'well recovered' and 'less well recovered' children as children can have both immediate and longer-term reactions to trauma and/or adversity. Furthermore, a fast recovery does not necessarily mean a full recovery and equally does not necessarily indicate high resilience, and similarly, a slow recovery does not necessarily indicate low resilience.

## Sample methods

The research made use of purposive sampling (Marshall, 1996) where researchers actively selected the most productive sample to answer the research questions, utilizing a criterion sampling system (Given, 2008). The main criteria used in the sample were:

- children are currently working as a child domestic worker or were formerly child domestic workers;
- children are aged between 10 to 20 years old; and
- children voluntarily consent and agree to take part in the study.

For life story interviewees an extra criterion was added, that children had experienced abuse of some kind at their workplace (emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse).

Identification of research participants for life story interview was made in three ways:

1. CWISH has a confidential database with over one hundred cases of child abuse handled by a helpline team each year (since 2007). CWISH helpline officials contacted 60 child domestic workers (10 boys and 50 girls) who have been reintegrated with their families (after experiencing sexual abuse) and 12 children (nine girls and three boys) expressed their interest to participate in life story interviews;
2. Orientations were held with children in 32 outreach centres (a free non-formal education programme for children) and schools on the issue of children's rights, child abuse and the protection services on offer for victims of abuse. After the orientation all children were asked to complete an information card where they marked whether they were interested in discussing the issue of child abuse and protection skills – a drop-box was used to collate the cards. When all the orientations had taken place, children who had expressed an interest were contacted and group counselling sessions were run in respective outreach centres and schools. At the end of these sessions children were asked to complete a pictorial questionnaire, with drawings of different types of abuse (see Annex 1) that enabled them to anonymously self-identify abuse as well as indicate their interest in being a research participant – through a series of tick boxes. Counsellors held consent meetings with children who had expressed an interest in being a research participant to explain the project in more detail. Orientations reached 126 children (32 boys and 94 girls) who were not accessing services and 157 children (68 boys and 89 girls) in schools who were accessing educational opportunities. From this process 115 children (33 boys and 82 girls) self identified as abused and 31 children (22 girls and 9 boys) showed an interest in participating in the research; and

3. From contact made by key staff at CWISH, school counsellors recommended four girls who all attended an orientation workshop before agreeing to participate in an interview.

Identification of research participants for focus group discussions was made through CWISH's network of outreach centres and public schools. In schools CWISH is running school clubs or counselling services for children and is also running a number of outreach centres delivering literacy classes and rights-based awareness activities for children unable to access school. Through meetings with the management teams specific schools or outreach centres were identified as suitable locations to run focus group discussions with children accessing services (in school) and children who were not accessing services (who were new to the outreach centre).

Key informants (adults) were identified and approached by CWISH personnel from a variety of professions (social work, law enforcement, health, policy, legal) working in the field of child abuse and children's rights who have experience of working with child domestic workers.

### Sample groups

As child domestic workers, through their isolation, discrimination and their dependence on their employer are considered to be at risk of sexual abuse, all research participants for this study were child domestic workers. In addition, three sample groups were used for the study as follows:

1. Child domestic workers who were accessing services (60 children): this is defined as children who had attended an 'outreach centre' (run by an NGO) or a government school for more than one month and/or who had taken part in a child club and/or had received services such as medical treatment, specialist educational support or counselling;
2. Child domestic workers who had not accessed services (45 children): this is defined as children who had attended an outreach centre for less than one month and/or children who attended a government school for more than one month but who had not taken part in a child club and/or had not received services such as medical treatment, specialist educational support or counselling; and
3. Child domestic workers who had been reintegrated with their family (12 children). These children had been supported by CWISH to leave particularly dangerous and harmful work situations, (all the reintegrated children who participated in this study had experienced sexual abuse) and are currently living back with their families or waiting to be reintegrated with family (living in a half-way house or shelter).

In total, 72 children of the 117 child participants in the study were receiving services from NGOs. In addition, most of the 72 children receiving services had been or were being supported by CWISH. This bias was recognised in the analysis of data from this sample group.

Table 1: CDWs Participants of the Research		
Participants	Life Story Interview	Focus Group Discussion
<b>Children who are accessing services</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>39</b>
10-13 Years Boys	0	0
10-13 Years Girls	0	0
14-18 Years Boys	5	21
14-18 Years Girls	16	18
<b>Children who are not accessing services</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>31</b>
10-13 Years Boys	4	13
10-13 Years Girls	10	18
14-18 Years Boys	0	0
14-18 Years Girls	0	0
<b>Children who are reintegrated with their family</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>
10-13 Years Boys	1	0
10-13 Years Girls	3	0
14-18 Years Boys	2	0
14-18 Years Girls	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>70</b>

## Research participants

**Number of research participants:** a total of 117 children were involved in this study and 13 adults with 47 children participating in life story interviews and 70 children in focus group discussions.

**Age:** child participants were aged between 10 and 18 years old with the average age 14 years old.

**Gender:** 60% of research participants were girls (71) with 40% of the participants boys (46).

**Ethnicity or caste:** out of the 47 children interviewed 11 children were from the Bramhin or Dashnami caste, nine were Chhetri, 23 were from the Janajati caste and four were Dalit; the remaining children did not identify their ethnicity or caste background.

## Methods

### Life story interviews

A life story is an account of a person's story of his or her life, or a segment of it, as told to another, it is "the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what the person remembers of it and what he or she wants others to know of it" (Atkinson, 1998). It is usually quite a full account across the length of their life but may refer to a period or aspect of their life experience. When related by interview to the researcher it is the result of an interactive relationship.

The objective of a life story interview is to acquire personal information and experiences to be used for research purposes. Towards this end, the interviewer has an "interactive relationship" with the interviewee to gain truthful information.

For this study a total of 47 life story interviews were held through a series of 'day camps' where up to six interviews were held simultaneously with five participants on average in each camp. Research participants were invited to one location and interviewed on a one-to-one basis by an assigned researcher over the course of the day in thirty minute to one hour research activities. Interviews were interspersed with creative group activities with the other researchers and child participants that countered the 'intensity' of the life story interview, so were designed to be fun and relaxing and/or energizing; and to create bonding between researchers and research participants. Children spent an average of four hours being interviewed and two hours in group activities over the course of one 'day camp'. All interviews were digitally recorded. See Annex 2 for an English translation of one life story interview.

During interviews the following structured activities served as 'jump off' points for story-telling and a guide for the children in recalling events and relationships. Guide questions were developed by researchers and served as a checklist of information that needed to be evoked from child participants:

1. **My Hand My Life:** through drawing around their hands child participant and interviewer explored the child's background, discussed the values the child and researcher hold dear, who the important people in their lives are, what they want to change about themselves and what their dreams are for their future.
2. **Houses:** through drawing the child's house (focusing on the house they were currently working in), interviewer and child discussed the child's family and the relationships within the employer family that s/he is working for.



Figure 2: Houses#1

3. **Community Mapping:** through sketching out a map of the local community in which the child worked and lived, interviewer and child discussed the child's mobility and relationships in her/his community (this activity was adapted to a group context for focus group discussions).



Figure 1: My Hand My Life



Figure 3: Houses#2



Figure 4: Community Map#1



Figure 5: Community Map#2

4. **A Day In The Life Of:** through completing a timetable for a 'normal' week's activities child participant and interviewer discussed the child's current everyday life.
5. **Tomorrow I Will:** through drawing and writing the interviewer facilitated a discussion of dreams and ambitions and performed a simple 'ritual' to end the interview.



Figure 6: A Day In The Life Of



Figure 7 Community Map from FGD

## Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions are known to be useful for exploring information about which people have a common understanding, for this study the key common denominators were that all the research participants were child domestic workers or former child domestic workers and aged between 10 and 18 years old. Additionally, however, other factors were used to group children together, each FGD was compiled of child domestic workers who:

- All lived and worked in the same vicinity;
- All either received services (such as medical treatment, specialist educational support or counselling) or did not receive services;
- Were in one of two age brackets 10-13 or 14-18 years old; and
- Were all the same sex (girls or boys).

In total, eight FGDs were held with 6-8 children on average in each discussion. As FGDs were held to gain data from children's collective experience on resilience factors, researchers adapted the 'community map' activity used in the life story interviews (above), to a group experience as follows:

- On a large piece of paper where the outreach centre was drawn in the middle, participants were asked to locate their work place in relation to the outreach centre;
- Participants drew lines from the outreach centre to their workplace using a different coloured pen for each child. The coloured lines drawn by the children were used to identify each child's mobility patterns and thus created a 'community map';
- During discussion children drew their mobility patterns by looking at the places they visited in the community and discussing why and how they go to certain places and the experiences of children in their travels around the community;
- Children identified, in particular, safe and unsafe places, locations they liked or disliked and frequency of visits to each place; and
- After the first FGD which was a mixed group of girls and boys, FGDs were held with single sex groups as boys had dominated the mixed group discussion.

Each focus group discussion lasted approximately two hours and was held in either an outreach centre or school. All FGDs were recorded and facilitated by a young researcher (lead facilitator) and an adult facilitator with another adult documenting the discussion.

Additionally, two FGDs were held after initial data analysis to explore and validate resilience factors identified from life story interviews. The research activity in these two FGDs was adapted to ensure the data focused more closely on children's feelings about certain locations in their community and their safety and protection strategies for locations that they felt were 'unsafe'.

The research activity was adapted as follows:

- Once children had produced the community map (marking their workplace and other locations they frequented) they were asked to use coloured pens to mark their feelings associated with each location: blue represented positive feelings, black represented negative feelings and red represented unsafe places with associated feelings of anxiety, risk or fear (see Fig. 7); and
- Discussion then centred around all the locations marked in blue (positive feelings), black (negative feelings) and red (unsafe places) and ended with children identifying their sources of support in relation to the unsafe places in the community and their strategies for protection.

Focus group discussions were held with 15 children (8 boys and 6 girls) representing children who were accessing and not accessing services and were led by two adult facilitators. See Annex 3 for a narrative report from one FGD with girls.



## Reflexive journals

All researchers kept informal reflexive research journals from the day the research project began where they recorded reflections on the research process including any unstructured observations and reflections on the researcher's own behaviour and reactions, records of conversations (other than the interviews or focus group discussions) and their ideas about the meaning of what happened or had been observed.

The journals helped in identifying the gaps that were found during the interviews. Data in the journals included the researchers' impressions of child participants' feelings during the interview process and supported analysis of the facts given by children. Data missing from interviews was also included by researchers in their journals, for example, some children chose to share information to the researcher when the digital recorder was switched off.

## Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted to gain a better grasp of the context, issue, and situation of child domestic workers in Nepal. Key informants were people who had been working with child domestic workers in some context for a number of years and were considered to be experts and stakeholders on an aspect of child domestic workers' lives. Interviews brought out data on cultural definitions of 'resilience', and the extent to which resilience is currently acknowledged and a part of interventions for child domestic workers in Nepal. Interviews sought to identify the kinds of interventions that strengthen resilience or conversely why resilience is not a part of interventions with children in Nepal. The data gathered from key informant interviews helped to ground analysis to the local context for theme development and contributed to discussion with practitioners on recommendations for adapting practice to the findings of the research.

Key informant interviews were held with 13 adult stakeholders from the medical profession, Child Protection Committee members, school teachers, NGO personnel and police. Interviews were held in the offices of the personnel being interviewed and lasted approximately one hour.

## Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data from life story interviews is always a challenge as the raw data is particularly voluminous. The system of analysis used in this research followed a process of transcription, data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Miles, 1994).

### **Three levels of coding allowed the progressive refinement of data:**

Level one coding made the voluminous data into organised data with a manageable focus.

Level two coding further focused the level one codes into categories.

Level three coding involved developing themes from the categories.



## **Transcription**

In this study, all 47 life stories of the children were digitally recorded during data collection and were transcribed by professional transcribers who were first briefed on the purpose of the study, the importance of maintaining confidentiality of the data and of transcribing the exact words of children. Transcriptions varied in length from 40 to 160 pages of Nepali script. Two transcriptions of the interviews were translated into English during the course of data analysis in order for the Lead Researcher and Oak Foundation's International Steering Committee members to check on the quality of the raw data. Additionally, all 13 key informant interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In the case of focus group discussions where it was not possible to capture a single story, all eight discussions were recorded and a note-taker recruited to observe and document key points of the discussion. A narrative report was subsequently produced for each FGD from the written and oral documentation of the discussion.

## **Level one analysis: coding**

Level one coding involved systematically combing through the transcriptions to identify characteristics and themes relevant to the research question and categorizing these. Coding of subsequent transcriptions was made in relation to the master list, adding or amending the master list where appropriate.

A four day workshop was held in September 2012 to undertake Level One Coding led by the National Lead Researcher and involving the Researchers Co-ordinator, two young researchers and the Project Co-ordinator for the research project as well as seven students with experience of qualitative research. This group coded all interviews but did not produce a master list of codes.

A review of level one coding was made in November 2012 by the Lead Researcher, the National Lead Researcher, the Project Co-ordinator and an FGD Facilitator, the review was facilitated by a consultant on research and a representative of the ISC acted as an advisor to the research team. From transcriptions of 20 of the 47 interviews, researchers created a master list of 121 codes with each code supported by quotes from the children interviewed (which researchers called 'statements'). Additionally, the research team received training on categorisation of data and theme development.

The Nepali research team subsequently coded the remaining 27 interviews and produced a master list of 236 codes in January 2013. This was reduced to a final list of 71 codes through a review of level one and two analysis in April 2013.

## **Level two analysis: category development**

Level two coding was conducted to further focus the level one codes into categories under which initial codes were matched and organised. Category development started in November 2012 and

was continued during a three day workshop in February. The team included the National Lead Researcher, the Project Co-ordinator, the Researcher's Co-ordinator, a CWISH counsellor, an FGD Facilitator and one of the Young Researchers. The team created 23 categories and 57 sub categories from the initial master list of 236 codes. This was achieved by reviewing the level one codes and categorizing them into similar topics or subject matter.

In April 2013 a team including the Lead Researcher, Lead National Researcher and Local Co-ordinator reviewed level one and two analysis, merging codes and categories to produce a master list of 71 codes, 25 sub-categories and 10 categories. Additionally data from focus group discussions was included in analysis discussions. This was achieved through the following process:

- All quotes (statements from children in interview) from codes were cross-checked with transcripts to ensure translation and meaning were correct and relevant to the context. This resulted in many changes, particularly as many of the codes had only one statement from a child and could therefore be merged with another code. A coding 'threshold' was developed whereby codes would only be developed if a minimum of three children had made relevant statements in their interviews; and
- The same process was undertaken for sub-categories and categories and resulted in a similar merging of categories.

### **Level three analysis: theme development**

Level three coding involved theme identification. Nine initial themes were developed by the same team that undertook category development in February 2013 and were intensively reviewed during a three day workshop in May 2013, facilitated by the Consultant Researcher and involving one of the Young Researchers, the National Lead Researcher and the Project Co-ordinator. CWISH Board member Shanti Asdhikari and CWISH Team Leader Bishnu Timalsina joined the workshop to provide input.

From this workshop five themes were developed that merged a number of the initial themes where there was obvious overlap. This was achieved through validation of each initial theme by discussion of the following issues:

- What was the basis for identifying the theme as a resilience factor?;
- Was there sufficient supporting data? When the supporting data was initially identified, the data was scrutinised to see if it supported the theme. Additionally, the translation of important 'statements' (quotes from children during interview) to support the analysis was checked to ensure that the voices of children were preserved;
- How did this theme help the child become resilient?;
- Was there a negative side to this theme? Did this theme strengthen resilience in some children but put others at-risk?; and
- How was this theme relevant to Nepali culture? What was the context?

After validation early drafts of each theme were reviewed, relevant data were again identified, important 'key words' identified and meanings defined (since English is not the mother tongue of the researchers in Nepal). Finally, all first and second level codes were reviewed and discussed to ensure that no potential data or theme was overlooked. During the process, supporting quotes and

narratives were again reviewed. This process was undertaken twice, during the review and after finalisation of themes.

Summaries: in total, 44 summaries were developed of life story interviews. Summaries were produced in April 2013 in answer to a need for a better picture of the connections between the raw data and the three levels of analysis and to provide a detailed sample of the research. Consequently summaries focused on data that, in some cases, was missing from level two and three analysis. Summaries were produced by re-reading all interview transcripts to document key data from the transcript. Key data focused on incidence of abuse in the story and evidence of children's thinking, feelings and action regarding situations of abuse. See Annex 3 for an example of one of the summaries produced.

## **Children's Participation**

In addition to young people's participation as researchers in this study, children were also involved via two other processes: a children's advisory board and the production of a film to disseminate the research findings to other children.

### **Children's advisory board**

A children's advisory board, consisting of 16 child domestic workers (four boys and 12 girls) was consulted three times over the course of the study. In June 2012 children were consulted regarding data collection and planning of data collection. Children advised on the timing of interviews to fit in with children's working commitments and on the best ways to negotiate with employers to ensure the participation of child domestic workers in the research.

In April 2013 the advice of 19 children (nine boys and ten girls) was sought to validate the initial findings from the research. Children participated in a one day workshop where they discussed and validated the initial themes and shared relevant examples from their own experience. In general, children supported all the initial nine themes although it was felt by some children that a theme looking at children who stay silent (in the face of abuse) and keep to themselves highlighted a reaction to abuse that was not appropriate, as they felt children should find someone to speak to and fight abuse (this theme was later merged with another).

A final consultation with children was held in July 2013 in parallel with a meeting of practitioners where recommendations from the research findings were developed. Overall, consultation with the Children's Advisory Board ensured the views of children were incorporated into data collection, analysis and recommendations for practice.

### **Producing findings for children**

Because the majority of child participants in this study have low levels of literacy it was decided that an appropriate way to distribute findings to children would be through a short film. In addition, as the research project uses a participatory methodology, it was felt appropriate and important that children should be involved in the creation of the findings report (film). Consequently a participatory film production company, Living Lens, was commissioned to produce a film with children that presented the findings of the research to other child domestic workers in Nepal. This took place during a five-day workshop with children in April 2013 and was achieved through the following process.

**Story Development Workshop:** In early April, in preparation for the film workshop, a story development workshop was held with 13 child domestic workers (nine girls and four boys) where participants discussed the nine initial themes in detail and were asked to choose one theme that resonated most for them as child domestic workers. Children chose the theme ‘finding someone to confide in’ and developed an individual story on the theme that was based on their own experience. Utilising a ‘story-cloud’ method, children then merged their individual stories into one and produced a draft script for the film entitled ‘Meena’s Story’.

**Film Making by Children:** Seven children were chosen (by their peers) to participate in the film workshop (five girls and two boys) using criteria such as their availability to continue working (the support and approval needed of their employers) and their interest or skill in film production and acting.

A five day workshop was held with children in April 2013, facilitated by a participatory film production company, where children took on acting, sound and direction roles to translate the script of Meena’s Story into a five minute film. The film follows the story of Meena, a child domestic worker who is sexually abused by the best friend of her employer’s son. Meena confides in her best friend who advises her to tell her employer about the abuse and the employer subsequently bans the abuser (her son’s best friend) from her house. Bonus material in the form of interviews with the production team and the cast (in character) explores the different perspectives of the characters in the story and their reaction to Meena’s actions. Data from these additional discussions with children was included in discussions on theme development.



CWISH plan to use the film in outreach centres and school clubs as a discussion tool to further explore and gather data on the theme of ‘finding someone to confide in’.

Figure 8: The Director checking on the line-up of the shot during the film workshop.

## The Engagement of National Experts and Practitioners

A National Advisory Board comprising academics, policy makers and practitioners was consulted twice during the course of the research project.

Advice was sought at the beginning of the research on the planning, ethical strategy, methods and sample. The board made suggestions to improve the diversity of the sample, on maintaining confidentiality and privacy of research participants and ensuring post research services for child participants.

The second meeting of the National Advisory Board took place when the second draft of the research report for the study was submitted to Oak Foundation's International Steering Committee on the Bamboo Initiative. National Advisory Board members were asked to comment on the local and cultural contexts of the three stages of analysis.

## Limitations, Challenges and Learning

The limitations and challenges encountered in this study enabled the research team to learn many lessons:

**Research sample:** initially the sample aimed to include children who had been reintegrated with their families in the neighbouring districts to Kathmandu of Sindhupalchowk and Kavre. However, enough children (12) were found who had been reintegrated in the Kathmandu Valley, therefore it was considered unnecessary to make use of two research locations.

**Timing of interviews:** ideally the approach to a life story interview is for the researcher to interview each participant a number of times for approximately two hours over a period of weeks or sometimes months. However, due to the restrictions of the working environment for child domestic workers, children were not available more than once. Consequently children were interviewed during a 'day camp' (workshop) for a total of 6 hours (including lunch and play time). Each interview averaged at a total length of 3 to 4 hours. This also affected the rapport building between the researcher and research participant as less time was available over the period of one day, consequently some children did not feel comfortable enough with researchers to discuss, in depth, their feelings or emotions around personal issues.

**Counsellors as researchers:** Nepal has a distinct lack of researchers experienced in qualitative research methods, consequently it was decided to train school counsellors to become researchers. Although using counsellors as researchers helped counter the rapport building problems outlined above, it meant that some researchers were not capable or comfortable to undertake level one analysis of their interviews (as had been planned).

**Guidance on methods:** the guidance on how focus group discussions can explore resilience with children was not as clear as guidance (and training) for life story interviews. Consequently FGDs were tested for longer and required more changes than interviews before the data produced was considered adequate. In addition, however, poor documentation of FGDs may also have influenced this result (as below).

**Documentation of FGDs:** initially, documentation focused on the processes of the FGD rather than the content of 'what children said' and, although digital recordings were made of FGDs it was very difficult to document 'what children said' in a coherent manner from these recordings. After the facilitation and the documentation guidelines for FGDs were adapted, the documentation of FGDs improved.

**Limitations placed on young researchers:** It was assumed that young researchers, as former child domestic workers, may find life story interviews upsetting or traumatic and that FGDs were a more familiar environment as they are similar to a workshop – which both young researchers had facilitated before. Consequently young researchers were considered more suitable for facilitation of

focus group discussions than life story interviews. However, FGDs proved to be more difficult to facilitate, due to their ambiguous nature than life story interviews (which were more clearly structured). It was consequently felt that young researchers could have undertaken life story interviews as well as FGDs and should not have been restricted to just one method.

**A lack of probing questions:** this research project is innovative in two ways, in that it focuses on the new concept of 'resilience' which needs to be understood and adapted to the context of Nepal, and that it is a participatory method which requires particularly strong ethical guidance. Training for researchers, therefore, focused on these two areas which, unfortunately, resulted in researchers not questioning children too intensely on their experience of abuse. This appeared to be because of the following issues:

- a) In looking for resilience it is not necessary to focus on a detailed description of exactly what happened in an abusive situation as the area of interest is how children coped or reacted to abuse rather than a blow-by-blow account of abuse (such as would be required for social work practice); and
- b) For ethical reasons researchers were not encouraged to question children too stringently about their experiences of abuse for fear of causing distress to them.

This resulted in a lack of data on how children dealt with abuse as researchers did not initially ask enough probing questions when the issue of abuse was raised. Although this issue was resolved in later interviews by the use of example probing questions for researchers, it meant that the data from earlier interviews was not as rich as interviews performed later in the study.

**Assumptions about children drawing:** it is often assumed in participatory methods with children that all children enjoy drawing, however, this study found that many children felt uncomfortable in making 'expressive' drawings. Children appeared to prefer 'functional or instructional' drawing that require less skill (such as the first activity in the interview where children simply draw around their hand). In addition, there was a significant difference in the detail and skill of children's drawings from this study (compare Fig. 2 with Fig. 3 as well as Fig. 4 with Fig. 5) which raises questions about the quality of data produced when children are drawing. If children are focusing on producing a beautiful picture for their interviewer rather than answering the interviewer's questions – is their concentration misplaced?

**Time restrictions in interviews:** due to time restrictions for interviews too much time was initially spent on discussing the 'background' to children's experience (such as their life in their origin family). In addition, children had often, worked in two or three households and researchers had to identify which of these experiences was most likely to provide data on 'resilience' as it was not possible to talk, in detail, about all of their workplaces.

**An adverse political environment:** data collection was delayed due to political turmoil during 2012 when there were regular national strikes and demonstrations. This political unrest made it very difficult and sometimes dangerous to travel around Kathmandu, both for researchers and research participants.

**Extended timeframe:** because of political turmoil, the research team had to make a no-cost extension to the research project of six months, this meant that a number of the researchers who



participated in research collection (employed on a part-time basis) were not available for the duration of the project, so could not participate in data analysis. This created some inconsistencies between data collection and analysis.

## Lessons Learned

The following lessons have been learned during the course of this study that could be useful for conducting similar research in the future.

Orientations on child abuse and the use of a pictorial questionnaire were particularly successful in obtaining data from potential research participants anonymously on their experience of sexual abuse. Orientations and group counselling services were held with children on the issue of children's rights, child abuse and the protection services on offer for victims of abuse. During these orientations children were asked to complete a pictorial questionnaire, with drawings of different types of abuse (see Annex 1) that enabled them to anonymously self-identify abuse as well as indicate their interest in being a research participant – through a series of tick boxes. The pictorial questionnaire used in the study is now being utilised by practitioners in CWISH's counselling team.

**For innovative research methods comprehensive training for researchers should be delivered through a local resource team.** Comprehensive train-the-trainers training should be delivered to a core team of two to three people on the whole research concept – in particular, data collection and analysis methods. This could take place at the beginning of the project and be transferred to researchers and facilitators as appropriate during the course of the project.

**Key issues relevant to the research project should be explored in depth by the core research team.** This is particularly relevant for innovative research (for example, the concepts of resilience participatory research and ethical research methods were the key issues relevant to this study). These issues should be explored in depth with the core research team and form part of the 'train-the-trainers' session. This could be through a discussion forum or expert consultation bringing key stakeholders in the research project together.

**Young researchers should be involved in all stages of the research process – including data analysis.** Although young people are often recruited to undertake data collection, they are rarely involved in analysis. In order to ensure young researchers are involved in analysis their time should be clearly allocated and roles specified. At least one young researcher should be part of the core research team.

**Research journals are an important method that can provide data not gathered through more formal means.** Research journals are particularly useful when researchers are new to their role although rigour should still be applied to the completion of research journals and they should be used in combination with regular reflection sessions with the research team.

**Day camps work well for life story interviews when time and child protection issues are a concern.** Day camps were organised for life story interviews that brought six children together and combined fun interactive group sessions with more intense one-to-one research activities. Employers felt less threatened and were consequently happier to release children for a 'day camp' than an 'interview'.



Additionally, children were familiar with the participatory energisers and interactive group sessions, which counteracted the intensity of one-to-one research activities.

**Activities that involve drawing should focus on functional or instructional drawings to ensure rich data are produced.** Not all children like drawing and those that do should be encouraged to use drawing to help them explain a point or to organise their thinking rather than to produce a beautiful piece of art-work. Drawing activities work best in life story interviews when they are functional or instructional and do not require too much skill from the child.

Focus group discussions require clear facilitation and documentation guidance and a pilot of the data analysis (by facilitators) to ensure appropriate data is gathered. Facilitation plans for focus group discussions need to be meticulously drafted so that facilitators are clear on the purpose of data gathering, this can be improved if facilitators are able to pilot analysis of data produced from the focus group discussion. In addition, clear guidance for documentation of FGDs is necessary. Reliance on a recording of the discussion is not enough as it is difficult to hear the narrative of a group of children talking. A series of forms for a note-taker to complete could be used in addition to a recording or the note-taker could take an active part in the focus group discussion and write notes on flip chart paper in front of children.

**Participatory research is costly and time-consuming.** The participatory and ethical elements to the research add considerable costs to a research project and require much more time to deliver than less innovative methods which should be accounted for in budgeting and planning. In addition, full-time employment of the research team (over a shorter period) should be considered to allow for a concentrated workload.

**Co-ordination of a national research project by an international partner requires regular travel to the research country at key points in the research project.** Although it is now possible to co-ordinate a research project from another country (via skype etc.) nothing replaces face-to-face contact. The experience of this research study suggests that international partners to research projects are involved at the following key times: during training before data collection, during data collection, during level one and two analysis and finally during level three analysis. It is particularly important for the international partner to be involved in analysis.

**The production of a film as an innovative way of disseminating research findings to children can also contribute to data analysis and enable follow-up action to the research.** Including a 'discussion' element to a film of the findings – whereby characters of the film discuss their perspectives and views on the story – can validate findings and support analysis of data. In addition, the film can be used as a part of a 'discussion package' (with guided questions that are used in combination with the film) that is shown in the research community to validate and explore further the findings from the study. Finally, producing a film instead of a 'children-friendly report' of the findings enables dissemination of findings to communities that have low literacy levels.

# 5. Results

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## Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from 47 interviews and seven FGDs – a total of 117 children. The richest data came from life story interviews, however many of the key findings from children's interviews are supported by data from focus group discussions, particularly as the research activity in focus group discussions was adapted from an activity in life story interviews on safety in the community. Child participants were all either currently working as child domestic workers or were former child domestic workers aged between 8 and 20 years old (the average age was 14). Consequently data are presented chronologically in the form of a (group) life story – although it should be noted that data were not gathered chronologically. Data in this chapter are from coding and categorisation of interviews and focus group discussions with children (with headings roughly in-line with the categorisation process).

## Family and Community Background

The vast majority of children came from families that live in the rural areas around Kathmandu. Their 'origin' family (the family they were born into) tended to be larger than the family they worked for (their origin family having a minimum of three children) with members of their extended family living close by. Children's parents were typically small-scale farmers dependent on animal husbandry for their living.

Swasti, aged 15, comes from a very poor family in the rural area of Ramechhap, about 80 km from Kathmandu. Her father has passed away and her mother is trying to support her four children on her own. Swasti's brother has already migrated to Kathmandu and is working as a bus conductor. Although the family are quite close knit their existence was precarious in the village, based as it is for many children interviewed, in the agricultural sector:

*"My family basically rear goats and manages the income from that."*

Children spoke positively about the practical help and support that they and their families received from their community; villagers helping each other when there were difficulties (particularly illness) or neighbours sharing tasks such as agricultural work and domestic chores. 13 year old Megha was one of six children, her father had re-married a woman who already had children. She talks very positively of the community spirit in her village:

*"They loved me and helped me when I went to cut the grass, they helped me to carry the grass and sometimes even when I was washing utensils they came and helped me."*

However, the picture of village life children described was steeped in poverty, with children often mentioning a lack of food in their origin family. In addition, most of the children interviewed were not going to school in their origin community – either because their family could not afford to send them, as children had to help with chores at home or because the school was a long distance away. Consequently access to schooling was a strong motivation for children who often voluntarily chose

domestic work. This decision was often based on a belief that children have better access to schooling in Kathmandu as well as a better quality of education.

Sarita is 16 years old hailing originally from the mountainous region of Dolakha about 70 km from Kathmandu. There are nine members in her family including seven siblings who work in agriculture and farming. Sarita first came to Kathmandu at the age of five. She was brought to the capital city by a relative from her village and came to gain better access to schooling:

*"I didn't have access to school in my village because it was quite far away and I had to walk 1-2 hours to get there."*

Uma at 11 years old, is one of the youngest children interviewed. She comes from a poor and violent family (her father becomes violent when he is drunk):

*"Life was difficult in my village, my mother and father don't earn anything. There are lots of family members and no income so I planned to go away to earn for my family."*

Children's lives were often affected by violence in their origin family and although some children mentioned family members they were close to (such as grandparents, mothers or siblings) more children mentioned domestic violence such as alcoholic or violent fathers and parents that fought regularly.

Hridaya, aged 16, has three siblings, her father is a taxi driver and her mother owns a shop. In her interview she describes a very violent home life, in particular her father's rages when he is drunk and inflicts brutal beatings on her mother. Hridaya is close to her grandmother who took care of her when she was very small. She explains that she tried hard to stop her father's drinking but hasn't been able to and that she wishes her parents didn't quarrel with each other:

*"One day there was a fight between my mother and father when my mother was pregnant, my father beat her, pushed her and she had a miscarriage."*

In addition, children were quite deeply affected by traditional belief systems in their rural communities and mentioned being afraid of the jungle or forest paths, they talked of their fear of ghosts and spirits or of being attacked by strangers (men and boys) in isolated areas of the village. Children mentioned the responsibility placed on the eldest child to provide an income for the family. This appeared to be closely connected to children's reasons for entering domestic work. 17 year old Samjhana started work at a young age and sends money home to her mother every month she talks about the expectation on eldest children to contribute to the family income:

*"Now I am old enough to earn, my mother always asks for money, as I'm the eldest child I do have some responsibility. Now I feel I can't go to school every day – so I think I'll have to earn."*

## Domestic Work

### Recruitment into domestic work

Recruitment into domestic work for most children interviewed meant a move from rural, village life to the sprawling mass of the capital city, Kathmandu: at least one day's travel by bus. Consequently children tended not to simply 'run away', the move had to be organised and children 'recruited' into domestic work. But the recruitment process was very informal, many children talked about 'aunties' or 'uncles' recruiting them (although this did not necessarily mean these people were blood relatives, they were often members of the community or extended family members) or their own parents organising their recruitment. The majority of children appeared to voluntarily choose to enter domestic work but this was based on a number of push and pull factors. For example, nearly all children in the study connected their recruitment into domestic work to better access to schooling (due to a common understanding that schooling is of better quality in urban areas than rural areas). However children were also attracted to the 'bright lights' of city life.

17 year old Kumar followed his brother's footsteps and came to Kathmandu to work as a child domestic worker. Originally from Parsa, in the southern part of Nepal, Kumar was living with his family of six who were very poor. The family had a good relationship with each other but, he explains that because of poverty, he had to find a job in Kathmandu. He couldn't study in his village and when he was offered work that included the promise of school attendance he accepted. He explains both push and pull factors:

*"I analysed my family situation when I was a child, my father always used to be stressed about how to raise the children. I thought I couldn't study in my village so it's better I go somewhere to make some money. I also wanted to see city life so I told my father and came to Kathmandu."*

Poverty was also mentioned as a key push factor, particularly for children who came from single headed households. There were accounts of single parents pushing children into domestic work, but also in families where one parent re-married or was living with a new partner, there were also accounts of the step parent urging children into domestic work. Additionally, a number of children mentioned their father's alcoholism as the reason they sought to move. Recruitment very often involved or was supported by family or neighbours. Janaki, a 17 year old girl who is not accessing services, was persuaded by her parents that she would find better opportunities to study in Kathmandu as a domestic worker than to continue with her studies in her village:

*"The recruiter told me it's better you go to the city and study than staying in the village and do nothing. But after coming here he made me work in someone's house."*

In the case of 15 year old Bina there was little choice. When her grandmother and sole care giver died, she had little option but to go into domestic work:

*"I was 7 years old and my grandmother died, one of my neighbours brought me to Kathmandu."*

Recruiters tended to make many promises of good food, clothes and, in particular, enrolment into schooling. However, children mentioned that their employers often broke the promises made during recruitment, this made them angry and sometimes engendered a sense of betrayal, particularly if family members had been involved in the recruitment process.

11 year old Uma says she was tricked by her mother into domestic work. Uma was a very active student in her home village, taking part in activities such as singing, dancing and poetry competitions, she lived with her parents and two younger brothers but her father fought with her mother when he became drunk. Uma says she was brought to Kathmandu by her mother on the pretext of visiting her relatives but was asked to stay with and work for her aunt. Uma managed to negotiate a condition to her employment with her mother and aunt – that she would be sent to school. But after three years she still had not been enrolled:

*"I was promised I would be sent to school when I was brought here and later when I asked them [employers] about when I would be admitted to school they kept on saying tomorrow, tomorrow. But later I was told I would never be sent to school and I was beaten for asking."*

17 year old Janaki was brought up by her grandparents and says she was spoiled and loved by them, but when her parents took her back at 11 years old she was treated very badly. They sent her into domestic work and over the past six years she has worked in five different households (one of which was in India). She is still a domestic worker, has been treated relatively well by her employers but feels a deep sense of betrayal and anger towards her parents:

*"In the beginning I used to give my earnings to my family but now I don't. Why should I? Because they don't consider me as a family member and I am not educated too, so better I save to buy jewellery later on...I have been here at my workplace since I was small away from my family, they don't really care about my well being and my conditions, all they are concerned about is how much money they will be receiving from my employer."*

## **Working conditions**

The vast majority of children in this study were 'live-in' domestic workers, living with their employers. This meant they had minimal contact with their origin families, although sometimes other family or community members worked close-by. Due to the stigma of being a domestic worker and the informal recruitment and employment arrangements, many children talked about their workplace as 'home' and their employers as 'mother', 'father', 'auntie' or 'uncle' and called the employer's children 'brother' or 'sister'.

Although some children mentioned starting their life as a domestic worker at the age of five years old (see, for example, Sarita below) most children started working aged 8 or 9 years. Children's daily tasks tended to start at 5am but did not finish until 10pm. Many children mentioned that they only have time for rest when they are asleep or are away from their employer's home (i.e. at school). Sarita is a 16 year old girl who started working at the age of five, in one of the first households she worked in she talks about the long hours that are typical for many child domestic workers in this study:

*"I have to wake up anytime my employers ask me to but normally its 5 am....and it's exactly 10pm when I complete my chores, then I have food and can sleep."*

Sarita talks about the importance of school, she is a good student and school is important to her, not just for the opportunity to study but as a respite from her heavy workload:

*"The time for me to rest is when I am at school."*

Children's main tasks are cleaning, washing, childcare and helping in the kitchen (rather than cooking which is often done by the 'mother' or female employer). Children also work in the small businesses of their employers. Girls, in particular, mention chores around childbirth – looking after newborn babies or women who have just given birth, as 20 year old Rita explains:

*"I used to study in the morning and then they started asking me to work. The woman had recently given birth to a girl so I had to wash the clothes and the regular tasks were to prepare tea, cook food, wash utensils but mostly I had to work in the kitchen and I also had to clean the house."*

### **Positive aspects of domestic work**

Children spoke quite sparingly of the intrinsic value of domestic work itself and although they did mention chores they liked, these were usually the chores they found easiest to perform. Shova has been a domestic worker for 12 years and started work when she was 8 years old; she has not met her family since. She endured heavy workloads, beatings and sexual abuse but when asked what she liked about domestic work, similar to many children in the study, she talked about chores she found easiest:

*"Washing dishes and cleaning rooms is easier but looking after children is difficult."*

Instead, domestic work appears to be valued for the opportunities it gives children. Children mentioned that their work enabled them to access school (or literacy classes) and some mentioned improvements in their standard of living (compared to village life) such as better food and clothes. Milan, a 13 year old boy who is not an orphan but was sent to an orphanage in India by his father is now back in Nepal, working as a domestic worker. He is happy to be back 'home' and is happy with his employer:

*"I am sent to school, given clothes and food to eat, this makes me happy in domestic work."*

16 year old Gita, explains the view that a number of children expressed regarding the contribution they were able to make to their family's income due to domestic work. For some children this gave them a sense of pride that they were no longer a financial burden to their family. This positive outlook on domestic work tended to happen when children had close relationships with their families, as Gita mentions, her sense of pride is associated with a responsibility she feels towards her family:

*"My family is earning money from my work which is helping them to provide for their daily needs. As the eldest child of the family I am also obliged to take care of my family; so enduring these difficulties is okay for me."*

## Negative aspects of domestic work

Children were much more vociferous in talking about the negative aspects of domestic work than the positive, they talked of disliking chores that are monotonous and physically demanding such as washing clothes, mopping the floor, washing dishes or carrying heavy loads. Manisha, a 14 year old girl who is not accessing services, says has a very supportive and kind employer who, when she became ill, financed an operation to improve her eyesight and has supported her through sexual harassment by a neighbourhood boy. Despite this unusually supportive employer, the tasks of a domestic worker are dreary and onerous, enough for Manisha to want to leave her employment:

*"It's boring to wash clothes because I have to repeatedly scrub until it is really clean. This makes me want to walk out of my job."*

Children talked of heavy workloads and long days and identified chores they considered to be dangerous which, in the main, involved cooking with gas. Children often complained of the difficulty in completing domestic work alongside homework from school. One girl explained that her day started at four in the morning washing clothes, cleaning the home and doing the dishes. By the time she has finished the morning chores and reaches school it is 10.30 am – half an hour after school starts. After school, again she undertakes household chores so that, by the time she completes her homework, it is almost mid-night.

Children particularly disliked the relatively common practice of being shut or locked in the house on their own – when the employer went out. Although some children mentioned that they got out of this situation by lying to their employer so that they would be allowed to go out with their friends.

Gita is a 16 year old reintegrated girl who feels that all employers treat domestic workers badly, and see children as a commodity:

*"Whenever they [employers] go outside I'm locked inside the house and not allowed to go."*

Gita goes on to explain how employers do not generally want to spend any money on their domestic workers:

*"I was not taken to hospital in time and later when the wounds in my hands started getting worse I cried and they took me to hospital and while returning they complained saying I was the reason they wasted their money."*

Many children complained of not being given appropriate healthcare when they became ill or were injured (even when their injuries were due to their working conditions). This last quote highlights a reference to children's feelings of being treated differently (particularly in relation to the employer's children in the family). Children did not like being told that they were not allowed to speak, or being given left-over food. In addition, children in focus group discussions reiterated this by saying they did not like going out with their employers, as their role was still one of servant not family member. Either they had to carry all the bags and things when visiting places or, if they were visiting their employer's relatives' houses they had to do domestic chores in these houses as well as their own (particularly during festival time). There was also recognition, from some children, of the low status that their position as a domestic worker gave them while conversely, employers who are able to

keep domestic help are given prestige. 19 year old reintegrated child, Mahima explains how she was 'shown off' to visitors during festival times as a status symbol:

*"The people in the house I stayed in viewed me just as a domestic worker and thought I should be kept in the background. During festivals the domestic worker is the one to wash utensils rather than getting involved in the ritual. They have kept me only for prestige."*

11 year old Uma, also says that she hates it when her employer acts caring towards her in front of other people, particularly as, in reality, she treats her badly and doesn't allow her to go to school:

*"She acts as if she loves me but she scolds me. She says that I am like her daughter in front of guests, she tells them that she has brought me here for studies, but after they go, it is the same."*

### **Children's connections to school and community in their working environment**

Children had a strong connection to school and frequently made reference to schooling or their studies. However, it should be noted that the experience of 'school' for many of the children in this study was not a government school but a literacy program (run by CWISH) in an outreach centre which prepared them to enter the formal state schooling system. These programs are, typically, two hours per day and run for six days each week, they are free to access for child domestic workers but would require the permission of employers to attend (and time off work). Children in the study going to state schools attend for six hours each day for six days a week. In this study, the children attending state schools often attended NGO run school clubs that run after-school classes on children's rights and empowerment activities for children.

In the main, children talked very positively about school – particularly when they felt their school was well resourced or when teachers were supportive and trustworthy. School was an opportunity to meet and make friends and both teachers and friends were sources of support and protection for many children. Some children mentioned liking school because it was a place where they could forget their difficulties. And, because many of the children were actually talking about an NGO programme rather than a government school, there was quite a strong connection between school and NGO services (notably a helpline that a number of children mentioned). For example, in many of the literacy classes or school clubs that CWISH run with children they provide life skills and rights training, consequently children stated that they felt an education gives them information to protect themselves from harm. Supriya is 15 years old and is currently attending a state school, where she has taken part in children's rights workshops as part of a school club, however her employers do not encourage her to attend school and she has a heavy workload. She sees school as a lifeline:

*"I like school because studying there you can become a good person and learn good things, you'll have an idea of talking with different people and how you should behave and when the male member comes near you and tries to harass you – you will have the hotline number where you can call and find the strategies to protect yourself."*



Although some children mentioned angry or cruel teachers and teachers who beat them, their key complaint about school appeared to be bullying – in particular being called derogatory names by friends and teachers. Although Supriya recognised the importance of school, it was also a place where she suffered discrimination:

*“I felt bad when my friends and teachers called me a street child and sometimes even called me the child of a street person and even beat me.”*

Children’s connections to their local community appeared to be weaker than those to school. Child domestic workers are, typically, quite isolated in the homes they live and work in, their mobility restricted to an area close to their employer’s household. This is supported by the children in this study – particularly from discussions children had on their mobility in the community (from interviews but more particularly from focus group discussions). In their discussions about community, children explained how they went to shops, the temple, playgrounds, school and the outreach centre, to friends’ houses (other child domestic worker’s houses) and to the relatives of their employers. A few children mentioned going to the hospital and to the cinema. The informal education classes run by CWISH and other NGOs in outreach centres in the community acted as a safe place in the community for many child domestic workers. Reintegrated child, Prasansa, aged 14 was promised access to schooling when she was recruited into domestic work. She felt very let down by her employers when they didn’t provide this for her but managed to overcome her embarrassment at being older than many of the children in the literacy classes provided at the outreach centre when she finally persuaded her employers to send her:

*“I like the outreach centre, you can say everything and talk to friends so I find it safe.”*

In focus group discussions children’s mobility in the community was closely connected to their chores or their role as a domestic worker – visiting small local grocers as one of their daily tasks or visiting temples with the employer’s family. Children liked going to the playground so they could meet their friends where they could talk more openly than at their employer’s home. Similarly children liked going to the outreach centre (sometimes referred to as school), as they could chat with friends on the way and take part in interesting recreational activities (child club etc.); children talked of finding ‘new brothers and sisters’ at outreach centres.

The key fear expressed by most girls regarding their mobility in the community was sexual harassment by men and boys; although girls liked going to places such as school and the temple, they saw walking alone in the street as risky. 16 year Janaki (not accessing services), who was severely harassed by two brothers in the neighbourhood (who threatened to gang rape her) expresses a fear that many girls shared regarding their inability to walk around the neighbourhood in safety:

*“I don't like the place in Thimi because it is quite isolated and you find only couples around, there aren't many people, but there are addicts there smoking marijuana. So I don't like the place and I find it unsafe.”*

From focus group discussions with girls it was clear that they expressed fear in association with the presence of boys whether in the playground, shops or on the way to various places in the community. One of the girls from one focus group said:

*"I like going to the playground because there I find friends to play with which I enjoy. But meanwhile sometimes I dislike going there as there are boys in the playground who harass us and I don't like that."*

One girl identified an 'office' (Village Development Council) as a location she disliked. However, in discussion of this point, she said she was afraid to walk around the area by the office because there were some boys who always harassed her. Girls in focus groups discussed how they were afraid to go to certain places in the community and consequently changed their routes in the community to avoid areas where boys might harass them or express anger towards them. When asked what they did when the boys were angry, the girls said:

*"We just keep quiet and walk and don't speak or react in response."*

## Abuse Experienced by Children

Although children did mention abuse that took place in their origin family or community, the focus of this study is children's more recent or current experience of adversity as domestic workers. Consequently the data presented concentrates on all forms of abuse in the children's working environment including the (urban) community the children are living in. Most of the data on abuse came from interviews during activity two (houses) where children described their working environment, although children in focus group discussions mentioned verbal abuse (scolding) and physical abuse (beating).

### Emotional and psychological abuse

**Scolding:** Many children in interviews and focus group discussions mention emotional and psychological abuse by their employer or employer's family. The majority of children talked of verbal abuse; being scolded by their employer when they make mistakes in their chores which would result in derogatory remarks to children about their worthlessness or low status. Swasti's statements are quite typical of many of the children interviewed, showing children's anger when they were scolded for what appeared to be a small mistake:

*"My employer used to severely scold me. I used to get scolded for everything – if I did anything wrong, if I was late home from school. She was very strict...when I worked in the kitchen and the meal that I prepared did not turn out to be tasty I got told off."*

Pradip is a 14 year old transsexual child,<sup>6</sup> who despite coming from a relatively well-off family (with a father working as a teacher) was bullied by teachers and pupils about being transsexual. Pradip was sent to live with and work for the Director of an organisation supporting transsexuals but was made to work very hard by him and was treated badly:

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<sup>6</sup> Pradip is the only transsexual child in the research sample

*"I had to work a lot in that house till midnight I had to sweep the floor and I could not sleep properly I was scolded every time and they used to treat me like a dog. I used to console myself saying, as I'm staying in the house, so I need to tolerate anything they do."*

Children complained about being treated differently (from other members of the employing family), particularly regarding the food they received but believed they were not in a position to ask for food when they were hungry. 16 year old Sarita suffered many years of scolding and beatings, she was not physically strong but was made to work long hours and consequently talks of fainting in school due her weakness. Her employers continued to deny her adequate food:

*"No I didn't [ask for snacks] because I knew they won't [give them to me]. If I ask for snacks they will scold me so I thought it was better to avoid scolding – so what is the point of asking for snacks?"*

Children were frequently threatened with physical violence (being beaten), although one girl, Janaki, suffered particularly nasty threats of gang rape by a neighbourhood boy who stopped her when she was walking through the community, pushed her to a wall and touched her body, she was scared and told him that she would complain to the female employer, but this did not work, rather the boy threatened her saying he was powerful and was not scared. Janaki elaborated on her story in her interview:

*"When I said 'what are you doing?' he asked me to be quiet and he said 'I'm not afraid if you tell your employers... I won't speak to you, I won't meet you anywhere and I'll get my friends and we'll rape you...when you go outside I'll abduct you, take you somewhere and rape you'."*

Although in Janaki's case this threat was not carried out, in the majority of cases the threat of physical punishment (a beating) was often followed through (see section on physical abuse) particularly if it was made by an employer.

**Unfair, cruel and humiliating treatment:** when talking about the reasons they disliked domestic work children generally complained about unfair treatment by their employer – that they are not given enough time to rest, not given enough food, not given appropriate medical treatment or not allowed to study. They complained that they are locked in the house and have too heavy a workload.

Many children felt it was unfair that promises made during recruitment were broken by employers – promises of food, clothes and school enrolment. However, it was the general stigma and low status of domestic work that contributed, in many cases, to feelings of humiliation, for example, when being teased by peers at school. Furthermore, children were particularly conscious of the difference between themselves and the children of their employer, they often talked of their employing family as a 'foster family' to hide the employment relationship or called their employer 'mum', 'dad', 'auntie' or 'uncle' and the children of their employer 'brother' or 'sister'. The ambiguity for child domestic workers around their relationships with the employing family was highlighted by children's complaints that they were not allowed to play or be together with the employer's children – which would not happen if they were living with their own family.

One reaction to cruel and humiliating treatment identified in the interviews was 'silence'. 16 year old Sarita was just 5 when she started work as a domestic worker. In her first couple of workplaces she was severely overworked and not given enough food, which resulted in a deterioration in her health as she grew older. She was also, later, sexually exploited at one of her workplaces and reacted to this by staying silent and keeping to herself – a strategy she appears to have developed early on:

*"My employers spoke [to me] only when I asked something to them. The rest of the time they remained quiet and the employer said 'you should not talk to my daughters' so later I developed the habit of not speaking to anyone."*

Prasansa, a 14 year old reintegrated girl with a strong spirit, felt humiliated by the degrading names she was called as a domestic worker:

*"The employer didn't call me a domestic worker but the other relatives said I was just a servant. I felt bad, and remembered my family..."*

She also felt betrayed by her employers as they didn't allow her to go to school – a promise made during her recruitment. But even with Prasansa's inimitable spirit, she recognises the power differences between domestic workers and their 'masters':

*"They used to (wrongly) blame me for many things and didn't let me rest even for a short while. I don't like people dominating me even though I am living in another person's home."*

Shova, like many of the children in this research, demonstrated her commitment to study and expressed anger with her employers when she was unable to complete her school assignments:

*"I didn't have time for school assignments, they scolded me when I studied at night and asked me to turn off the lights so when everyone was asleep I woke up, lit a candle and studied. I couldn't complete all the work and went to school with incomplete tasks."*

This lack of regard for Shova's interest and commitment to studying was, however, superseded by more damaging cruelty and humiliation that seemed to focus on a key vulnerability for Shova and for many child domestic workers – her isolation. Shova's employers scolded her and beat her if they found her talking to anyone outside the house:

*"They used to lock me in the room. I couldn't even go to the toilet. If it was too much I used to do it [urinate] in a plastic bag and throw it out of the window."*

For a number of children, like Shova, cruel and humiliating treatment felt like torture to them and was closely associated with or followed by physical abuse. Shova eventually confided in neighbours and was able to leave this household, but even now that she is living independently and is in training to be a caregiver, she feels vulnerable in her room on her own – only feeling safe when she has many people around her.

## Physical abuse

Many children reported physical abuse (being beaten) by their employer in interviews and focus group discussions, this was nearly always as a punishment for getting a task or chore wrong. Very

often children were accused of stealing and were beaten as a punishment for not admitting the theft.

12 year old boy, Prem, was beaten regularly by his employer's son for relatively minor 'mistakes' which made him angry and afraid:

*"I get scared when I wash glass utensils because if I break them I get beaten."*

When Megha was just 9 years old she was accused by her employer of stealing money and was severely punished:

*"They tied me up, poured water all over me and beat me telling to return back the money that they accused me of stealing. I said I haven't stolen the money but they kept on beating and I fainted."*

Children talked of being beaten as a way for their employers to control them and create fear in them so that they won't complain, answer back or go against their employer. Although corporal punishment is commonplace for Nepali children, child domestic workers reported that employers could beat them with impunity because, as a domestic worker, whatever happens in the employer's home is a private matter. In some cases, even the employer's children would beat the child domestic worker (such as in the case of Prem, above) although in others, the children of employers were a protective force – as in the case of Fulmaya. Before Fulmaya ran away from her abusive workplace she suffered very severe beatings from her employer for almost any misdemeanour – not washing clothes properly or even when she was following her employer's instructions to leave the house (on an errand). She talks of her employer treating her like a 'punching bag' and how her employer would take out all her frustrations and anger on her:

*"My employer used to make me do too much hard work but never appreciated my hard work and often beat me. She used to beat me too often. Once she beat me, pouring all the frustration she got after she found her son smoking weed in the house: she beat me and told me to get out of the house."*

But, in this case, Fulmaya was also beaten for leaving the house. And anyone who intervened on her behalf was also in danger of receiving a thrashing; her employer's daughter often protected her as well as a neighbour:

*"I always get beatings for not washing the clothes properly....I said I'll run away and I put on my jacket and when I was in the staircase, she pulled my hair and dragged me upstairs, locked the door and beat me with sticks...when she was beating me the neighbour heard and came round and asked why I was being beaten, Aunt [employer] said 'she is working in my house, so it's none of your concern'."*

Fulmaya reported that, in this incident, even the neighbour got thrashed by her employer for intervening.

## **Sexual abuse**

Many children who had experienced sexual abuse did not mention it explicitly in their interview. However, in some cases, their experience of abuse was known from case files by held on all the

children interviewed by CWISH. Case files indicate that 30 of the 47 children interviewed had experienced sexual abuse in their workplace (22 children abused by a guest of the employer, four abused by their employer and four by neighbours) whereas only 17 children made specific mention of sexual abuse in their interviews.

In this report use of the term sexual assault is used to mean any involuntary sexual act in which a person is threatened, coerced, or forced to engage against their will, or any sexual touching of a person who has not consented. Additionally, term 'non-contact sexual abuse' includes invitation to touch another in a sexual way, voyeurism, encouraging or forcing a child to masturbate or to watch others masturbate, indecent exposure (flashing) or showing genital areas, involving a child in the viewing or production of pornographic materials or in watching sexual activities; and encouraging a child to behave in sexually ways (e.g. simulating intercourse).

**Non contact sexual abuse:** non-contact abuse was reported in ambiguous terms by children. Many children reported sexual harassment – being talked to in a 'different' way by their abusers, being 'teased' or 'bad words' being said to them. By this they meant sexually explicit language being used or sexual jokes and offensive, derogatory stories being told to them that have sexual overtones. Janaki, aged 11 years old worked in five different houses, one of which was in India. Although Janaki mentions sexual assault in the following quote from her interview, she also suffered particularly nasty sexual harassment:

*"There is a boy nearby who always followed me and said that he would marry me. He asked me to let him to have sex with me. He used to touch me forcefully, tried to kiss me and touch my chest and open my clothes. When I said I won't talk with him he said it won't matter as he will gang rape me...The boy's brother used to tell me that I worked in a brothel in India as a prostitute. He used to ask how much I got paid there and he will also pay me that amount and have sex with me."*

Many girls talked about being sexually harassed or teased by boys in the community, particularly in focus group discussions – this teasing, though, was usually a euphemism for sexual harassment. In one focus group with girls, they identified a number of unsafe areas in their community and mentioned that:

*"...walking alone in the street is unsafe as the boys and men who hang around the streets tease and call out bad words to tease [sexually harass] us."*

Quite often, non-contact sexual abuse was part of grooming behaviour before contact abuse took place. In 19 year old Mahima's case, she explains that she was treated as special by her abuser (the employer's father), before the abuse took place. Special treatment is a common grooming strategy:

*"At first he said I was like his granddaughter. Later that old man started to behave badly with me. His wife had already died. He used to come near me and touch my body."*

Data indicated that children were often groomed by their abusers by being shown pornography, also that children were taken on special outings by their abusers. Abuse took place most commonly in the employing family's home, when children were on their own. 17 year old, Samjhana, who is still working as a child domestic was sexually abused by two of her employers when she was very young

(aged 7 to 8 years old). In the first case she was asked to massage her employer, in the second she was groomed by the 'grandfather' of the house by being shown pornography and was subjected to non-contact sexual abuse:

*"The grandfather in the house asked me to watch bad things [pornography] and wanted me to do the same. When I shouted he didn't do anything, locked me inside and went out of the house. In the cases when I didn't shout he asked me to take off my clothes."*

**Sexual assault (contact sexual abuse):** in interviews children mentioned abusers fondling them, touching their private parts and being asked to massage them.<sup>7</sup> Abusers used threats and fear to stop children from resisting abuse. Most children talked of abuse in an ambiguous way:

*"That old man [employer], he came to my room at night and pulled off my blankets and asked me to go to his room, he asked me take off my clothes and forcefully wanted to do something which I didn't like and I refused. So I screamed and he locked me in the room for two days and after two days I went down to the neighbour and told him everything and he said if he does it again, tell it to us and we'll call the police." Samjhana, aged 16.*

Gita, a 16 year old reintegrated child who went on to suffer sexual abuse, was initially asked to massage her employer:

*"I had to massage the two employers (female) every night with oil. They used to strip naked and I had to massage their body. The male employer used to ask me to massage him when there was no one around. He used to look at vulgar pictures and touch me."*

Gita complained to the female employer but nothing happened so she kept quiet as she thought people would blame her. At another workplace Gita was asked to massage her employer again:

*"The employer used to ask me to massage his hands and legs. Then he used to push and rub his hands inside my body and then touch my mouth. It was too much."*

She describes her experiences as torture, and said she felt like dying and running away. She did eventually run away from this house and is now in a shelter for abused girls.

Children who talked about sexual abuse more explicitly tended to be reintegrated. These children had the most harrowing stories and would have, in all likelihood, had to tell their story before (to police, social workers or the courts as many of the reintegrated children have taken their abusers to court). They gave more detailed accounts of their abuse and appeared to be able to more easily reflect and learn from their experiences. One reintegrated girl, Sita, ran away from her employer but was 'rescued' by a man who went on to rape her for two days:

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<sup>7</sup> Although massage is common in Nepal – it is same sex massage (for instance a pregnant woman is often massaged by girl). Being asked to massage someone of a different sex would not be acceptable.

*“When I ran away from the house where my brother [employer] tortured me a man told me he would help me and took me to a garment factory and there he raped me continuously for two days and threatened to kill me if I mentioned it to anyone.”*

Sita frequently had suicidal thoughts and believed that her misfortunes were due to not having a mother and ‘bad karma’ (misfortune resulting from her bad deeds in a previous life). Now, however, with support from an NGO she is no longer suicidal and has developed a strong desire to do something with her life to show her father (who neglected her when her mother died). She believes that she can be a better person if she works hard in her new hostel. She wants to help people who have been through situations like hers and mentioned learning computer and sewing so that she could teach these skills to other children like her.

In another case, Rita, now aged 20 and successfully reintegrated, was a domestic worker but was also sexually exploited by her female employer and forced into prostitution. For five years she says she did whatever her employers asked her to do; domestic labour and sexual exploitation. She was too afraid to say anything to anyone or to fight against her employers:

*“Sometimes I had to work as a prostitute. If I didn't agree, my employer used to scold and beat me. So I agreed. It continued for a year. I wanted them to stop it but never got the courage as they used to beat me up.”*

Rita did eventually find the courage to run away from her exploiters and is filing a case against them.

**Emotional effects of sexual abuse:** a number of children became emotional when discussing their sexual abuse in interviews stating they were still very afraid and had given up thoughts of a better life. Gita a reintegrated child, aged 16, was sexually abused in two of her households:

*“I start shivering the moment I see the abuser and I'm really scared of him. I can't do anything, not even studying, I studied until class four but once you get abused you get to know that work is more important than study. I had thought that I would be a great person by studying but it does not matter in reality.”*

Gita expresses a common reaction to sexual abuse of fear and immobility. She says she was suicidal at the time of the abuse, but she was able to run away from her abusive household and is recovering well, she now has plans to become a ‘tempo’ driver (a small taxi that many women in Nepal drive).

## **Leaving domestic work**

Although children mentioned changing employers they tended to explain how these changes took place when they had run away or were rescued. Consequently, it was difficult to see to what degree children themselves were instrumental in changing employers. Most children interviewed had two or three employers with some up to six. In most cases, researchers focused their questions on the last or current place of employment or on a workplace that appeared to be particularly abusive or adverse in order to gain data on how the child reacted to an abusive situation. A number of children mentioned that they changed employers because they did not have access to schooling (promised in recruitment) and many of the reintegrated children talked of running away from abusive environments often with the help of a neighbour or of being rescued. Although 17 year old Kamal was able to escape on his own:



*"The employer's son had stolen money from the piggy bank of the daughter. I was accused of stealing and was severely beaten. I was burned with an iron. My mouth was covered by a cloth. I somehow escaped. I jumped from the second floor and ran to a bazaar."*

Children also mentioned some of the factors that kept them in a workplace, even when they were not happy there. In the main this was children's access to education, which was by far the biggest motivating factor for children to enter domestic work in the first place. Suresh, a 14 year old girl, keeps quiet when she is being scolded by her employer until the situation returns to normal, she explains her reasons for doing this:

*"I am here to study and should not do anything that may harm my education."*

In addition, domestic work provides children with an income (although not all receive it themselves), so staying in a job, despite the difficulties faced in the workplace, provides income for themselves, or more often than not, their families. For many children, such as 17 year old Samjhana, this income is associated with achieving a goal they have set themselves. Despite being beaten and suffering sexual abuse at the hands of a previous employer, Samjhana is hopeful of her ability to open a tailor shop by saving a little money:

*"I need to continue to work and save my salary so that I can open a tailor shop in the future. Therefore, enduring some difficulties is not a big problem."*

## Sources of Support

Children mentioned a wide range of people that were important to them (partly because of the 'hand' activity in interviews where they were asked to name someone of importance in their lives). Children's explanations as to why these people were important highlighted supportive relationships. These were, in the main, mothers and siblings, with children citing that it was because these people cared, supported and protected them. In addition, extended family, in particular grandmothers, aunts and uncles were often cited as supportive.

**Employing family:** within their working environment children mentioned supportive relationships with the employer's children (whom they often saw as like a brother or sister) – in focus group discussions children mentioned that employer's children often protected them from being scolded or beaten by their employer. Female employers were regularly cited as supportive and caring and children appeared to feel better supported by their employers when they were treated as one of the family instead of a 'worker'.

**Neighbours:** employer's neighbours were reported quite often as sources of support – a place of refuge where children ran to when they argued with their employer. Milan, aged 13 is a quiet, humble boy who misses his father – even though his father sent him to live in an orphanage when he was not an orphan (his mother had died). He is now a child domestic worker for the manager of an orphanage:

*"When they scolded me I didn't do anything, I just kept quiet but when they beat me I used to run out of the house and go to the neighbouring home and stay for one or two days then go back to the house."*

**Shopkeepers:** as domestic workers, children have regular contact with shopkeepers (grocers) in the community who were often seen as a ‘friendly face’. Children in focus group discussions, in particular, mentioned shopkeepers as sources of support. In one focus group discussion with children who were not accessing services, children talked about one shopkeeper in particular whom they called ‘grandma’ because *“she is polite, lovable and doesn’t irritate us.”* In other focus groups children mentioned shopkeepers who gave them credit for school supplies or for food when their employer was not at home (and they can’t get into the house to eat). For some children, shopkeepers were instrumental in them accessing services. Take, for example, 17 year old Samjhana who was beaten and sexually abused by a series of employers but is still working as in domestic service:

*“One day I went to the grocers to buy a new gas cylinder, the shopkeeper informed me that a CWISH school [literacy class] has been opened for child domestic workers in the community and I can join this school. Then I talked to my employer and she allowed me to go but I have to make sure all the work is finished on time and I still have to take care of the child.”*

**NGOs:** it was not surprising that personnel from NGOs were mentioned by children (particularly reintegrated children) as people who gave them motivation and practical support as 33 of the 47 children interviewed had been or were being supported by NGOs in some way. Many children mentioned helpline staff or counsellors as important people in their lives. They also mentioned the financial support offered by NGOs that has helped them to continue with their education (scholarships that cover the costs of stationary and uniforms) or counselling services run by NGOs.<sup>8</sup> Reintegrated child, Mahima, explains how her support continues into the future:

*“I’m studying now and it was due to the help of CWISH [NGO], they have agreed to support me until next year.”*

**School:** additionally, female teachers were mentioned as people children talked to who made them feel safe, particularly when they were new to school or when they had difficulties with their friends. Manisha dropped out of school for a while, due to her domestic work, but she is still very enthusiastic about her education:

*“Whenever I get beatings I share it with my teacher, I feel safe when I share it with her.”*

Manisha’s teacher was able to help stop the beatings she was receiving from her employer, Manisha goes on to say that her teachers are important to her and that she wants to be a teacher in the future.

**Friends and family:** friends were mentioned as key sources of support – both in terms of offering practical support (such as helping with chores or school assignments) but also in terms of sharing problems (see the section on sharing problems). Most of the friends of children in the study are child domestic workers like themselves. Children in focus group discussions mentioned, in particular, how friends gave advice (suggesting a change of workplace for example), were empathetic and

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the majority of children interviewed were being supported by CWISH or other NGOs so they are likely to mention the support of NGOs.

understanding of their feelings, offered practical support (lending money) and provided company (safety) while walking around the community (to shops and the playground) and that they liked to buy things for their friends.

In one focus group with girls, friends were constantly referred to as a source of support or respite:

*"I like going to the playground because there I find friends to play with which I enjoy...I like visiting the shops because my friends also come there to buy things and at that time we get the chance to meet and talk, at least for some small time, which makes me feel good...I like going to the river to throw the [household] rubbish out because my friends go there to throw rubbish too and after we've done that we go to the nearby playground and talk for some time."*

In interviews children talked about confiding in friends for emotional support, 15 year old Bidhya's primary task was looking after the 'grandmother' of the house:

*"I used to get scolded and beaten by the employer for not looking after the grandmother who was not mentally sound. In fact, I used to feed her well and look after her but she always complained that I did not...At that time I used to stay quiet and felt like going home. Later on, I shared this with my elder sister and my friend who gave me emotional support. This helped me a lot."*

Swasti, aged 15, did not feel comfortable enough to share her problems with her friends but, nevertheless, they provided her with support in other ways:

*"Whenever I get sick my friend nearby helps me with household chores."*

Family, too, were often a huge support. Children particularly mentioned mothers and siblings as people they would turn to for advice. Yuvraj, a 12 year old boy, works with his sister and confides in her:

*"I live along with my sister and she listens to my problems, therefore whenever I faced difficulties such as scoldings by my employer for making mistakes, breaking utensils and even if I am beaten up by boys on the street, I tell it to my sister. She advises me to ignore things."*

And it was usually family that children first turned to when they wanted to leave their workplace. This is probably because, in many cases 'contracts' for domestic work are written or, more often, agreed verbally between parents and employer rather than between children and the employer. And, in some cases, children's salary is paid directly to their parents. 17 year old Samjhana has worked in five different households and was sexually abused in two of them...in each case it was her father, who lived close-by, who found her the workplace and who also took her away. Many children's parents, however, do not live in Kathmandu, so contact with them is minimal.

## **Safety and Protection Strategies**

Safety strategies by children interviewed are taken to mean preventative action that they take to keep them safe from danger. Children's safety strategies were often based on their fears – of

intruders, of ghosts or of physical violence. However, the data outlined in this section focus more closely on children's safety strategies in relation to sexual abuse or exploitation.

### Feeling safe and strategies for safety

Children were aware of unsafe times and places in their working environment although most of these related to intruders or evil spirits. Children mentioned feeling safe (from intruders) when the house was locked, when they were in the temple room (based in the house) or when they were on the terrace. 17 year old Mahima expresses a common fear child domestic workers have of intruders to the house, particularly when they are working at home on their own:

*"I feel safe on the top floor where there is a 'temple room' because I've heard that an outsider, if they try to break in, will shiver if they go to the temple room."*

Children seemed to feel generally safer during the day when there were more people in the house or the community (for example during festival time), in the morning *"when everyone is fresh"* and in particular when the female employer is present. They connected this feeling of safety with an ability to shout out and seek help should they need it. 15 year old Solochana comes from a family background of violence, and has been beaten and shouted at by her employers:

*"I used to be afraid during the night (and not during the day) because during the daytime you can go to a friend if you need help, but you can't do this during the night."*

Shova, a 20 year old reintegrated young woman was purposefully isolated by her employers, she was scolded and beaten if they found her talking to anyone outside the house, and at one point was locked in her room for two days as a punishment. Shova highlights how the isolation suffered by many child domestic workers increases their vulnerability to abuse:

*"I felt safe during Saturdays because everybody will be at home and if you shout they'll recognise you and come and help."*

Children also mentioned school, the outreach centre or the playground as places where they could forget their problems or where they felt safe, connecting this to feelings of fear or apathy from the employer's family. Shova, again in her interview, talked a lot about where she felt safe – away from her abusive environment:

*"I feel safe when I'm at school because in school there are friends and teachers who can act if something happens but at home the family members might be unaware and they might just complain saying why did you come when you can't do anything."*

Children identified that it was unsafe to walk alone in the community (often because of the risk of being beaten-up by gangs). Common tasks for child domestic workers are fetching water (from a public tap), buying groceries and running errands for employers in the local community. Children expressed their desire to perform these tasks in a group but could only manage to do this with fetching water because it took place at the same time every day. So, they waited for friends and went together to fetch water. 14 year old Prasansa explains this common strategy:

*"We don't have water in our home so I have to go out, at that time I go with my friends in a group [to be safe]."*

In addition, children in focus group discussions talked of 'cheating time' with their employer by arranging to meet friends at a location in the community where they were sent on an errand, or at a safe location that was on the way, such as a temple, in order to play and talk for a while with friends.

## **Protection strategies on sexual abuse**

Protection strategies are taken to mean the strategies children devise when they know they are already in danger. Data focus on the risk of abuse and sexual abuse in particular, rather than other forms of 'danger'.

In talking about sexual abuse children initially mentioned three key strategies that they used to protect themselves from further abuse. The first strategy was going to a safe place – which they identified as either an open space (such as a terrace) or a place where there were a lot of people (such as a public space). 19 year old young woman Mahima explains the strategies she employed to protect herself from sexual abuse:

*"Firstly I used to think a lot about what the person [abuser] is doing to me, I used to get angry with him and even pushed him some times. And he used to say 'you are staying in my house, eating my food' and he didn't allow me to do the things I wanted to do. And then I used to open the curtains, doors and windows and went outside to the terrace. If I stayed outside I got scolded by the Aunt [employer] and if I went inside to work I found the Uncle [employer/abuser] so I chose to be outside and to get scolded by the Aunt."*

This idea of a public space (where people could hear or see children) was connected to the second strategy, to shout out when abuse was attempted – so that other people would hear and come to help.

16 year old girl Gita has lived in violent and abusive households all her life, her employer asked her to massage him when no-one was present, he would look at pornography and sexually abused Gita. She states, in her interview that she felt scared and would avoid working in his room as far as possible. She then goes on to express, with a confidence not present in many children's stories, how she will protect herself from abuse in the future:

*"In the present house nobody can even touch me because I am strong enough and if they do anything I will shout."*

The third and most obvious strategy for those with limited resources was to avoid the abuser. Children mentioned avoiding being alone with the abuser, going out of the house on errands etc. to avoid their abuser. When the abuser was the employer or a visitor to the house (which was the majority of cases) this meant avoiding rooms or places in the house where the abuser was likely to be on his/her own. 17 year old Samjhana explains how she stopped cleaning her abuser's room:

*"I stopped going to his room I didn't even sweep up and when he asked 'Why aren't you working in my room?' I said, 'I don't want to'."*

However, Samjhana's story also illustrates just how little control child domestic workers have over their environment:

*"I felt scared in that house. The man [employer] used to come to my room every night and ask me to undress myself. He used to pull off my blankets and touch me. He even used to show me vulgar movies and tell me that we should try to imitate them. He used to tell me to take off my clothes and he would try to come into my room. And when I refused to undress myself he once locked me in the room for two days. And I banged the door and asked him to let me out but he didn't."*

In some cases, children's immediate reaction to sexual abuse was a more instinctive 'repulsion', in Prapti's case a literal pushing away of the abuser. Prapti at 9 years old was the youngest child interviewed for this research, in her interview she talked of her experience of attempted sexual assault by a man in the neighbourhood – which took place a year before she was interviewed:

*"When that old man pretended to show his affection for me and moved his hand over my body I just pushed him and ran away from the place and hid myself inside the home, if I had not done that he might have done bad things to me."*

11 year old Uma had similarly quick reactions to attempted abuse. As well as undertaking domestic chores she also worked in a small cafe run by her employer, she explains why she left this household so suddenly:

*"We have a common room to sleep at our workplace for all the workers and the room was left unlatched. One night when I opened my eyes I saw Uncle [male employer] was at my side and moving his hand over my body. I got scared, I could not speak out. Next day I left the place without telling anyone."*

## Sharing problems

A key strategy for children facing difficulties was to share their problems with a 'confidante' – someone who will keep their problems confidential. This person was generally a friend but it was also sometimes a family member. Confidentiality and trust seemed to be key factors children were looking for in a confidante. A number of children interviewed recommended that children should find someone to confide their problems in. Furthermore, in validation workshops with the Children's Advisory Board for the research findings as well as in a film workshop (with members of the Children's Advisory Board), children recommended finding 'someone to confide in' as the best strategy for dealing with their problems:

*"You should not keep your problems to yourself, you need to find someone who you are able to trust and will keep your problems confidential; you should share your problems with them."*

Children mentioned confiding in others when there were tensions in their (origin) family, when they were beaten by their employer and when there were things they were unhappy about in their working environment; they also talked to confidantes when they had been sexually abused, in particular when abuse had been attempted. Karishma, a 16 old girl explains how her friend confirmed her fears of sexual abuse:

*"Along with the grandmother I told those things [incidences of abuse] to my friend and she said that 'yes the man is like that, even he tried to touch my body before.'"*

It appeared, however, that children often told an adult (rather than a child) about sexual abuse after the event, particularly if it was a sudden and violent sexual attack. This is illustrated by 18 year old Sweta who was sexually assaulted by a stranger and recalls how, in shock, and not knowing what to do, she desperately needed someone to confide in:

*"After being raped I was walking on the street without knowing what to do. I found the brother (of her employer) I told him everything about what happened to me and he took me to the police and filed a case over there. He [the employer] was supportive to me at my workplace as well."*

Although children spoke of sharing their problems with friends and family, it was more common for children (notably girls) to be selective about information they shared with their family. This appeared to be because they did not want to be a burden to a family that already had many tensions; or they were afraid to share their problems with family for fear of being scolded and beaten. Children also said they did not want to tell friends for fear of humiliation or of not being believed and being blamed for the problem (of sexual abuse in particular). 13 year old Megha talks of her reluctance to speak out about the sexual harassment she was suffering from a man in the community:

*"I never said anything about my problems [of abuse] because I thought they would say it was my fault and wouldn't believe me."*

Swasti, a 15 year old girl who was sexually harassed by boys in the community, illustrates the barriers children feel they face when sharing their problems with others:

*"I had friends and I shared everything with them but I didn't share the problems I faced in my employer's house, I felt that, if I share they would humiliate me and they can't do anything to help, so I thought I would find the solution myself and keep my problems to myself...even in my village we are poor and have a lot of tensions so I don't want to add some more."*

But it was perhaps the stigma associated with sexual abuse that was the biggest barrier to children in talking about it openly. 19 year old reintegrated child Mahima articulates it well:

*"Initially I was confused about what he was doing, later on I realised he was doing all bad things and when I asked him to stop he said 'who are you to stop me at my home'.... I was scared of telling this to anyone as it might be my own fault and also my schooling may stop because I may have to leave the house."*

## **Coping Strategies**

Coping Strategies, in this study, is taken to mean the efforts children employed (both behavioural and psychological) to overcome, tolerate, reduce or minimize abuse.

## Coping with physical and emotional abuse

The most common reaction to physical and emotional abuse (being scolded and beaten) expressed by children was anger. Children had two key coping strategies for anger. Firstly and most commonly, children kept quiet, this helped to avoid further punishment or abuse. Sweta an 18 year old reintegrated child who was overworked and beaten when she didn't complete her chores illustrates this well:

*"Whenever I used to get angry I drank water and kept quiet because if I had shouted it would be an issue and I would get more beatings – that's why I kept quiet." Sweta also says that she couldn't stop her tears, 'I didn't say anything when my employer beat me because the more I shared this with others the more beatings I got. So, I kept it to myself and kept silent."*

It appears that most children kept silent for a number of reasons. Firstly, children said they were not in a position to do anything but keep quiet and listen. Secondly, children didn't believe the employer would change their behaviour if they spoke to them and thirdly, children often mentioned getting beaten if they argued back to their employer (more boys mentioned arguing with their employer than girls) so they kept quiet to avoid physical abuse.

The second coping strategy was for children to go to the temple and pray to God for help – the temple was seen as a safe space and this strategy was connected to a strong belief that God would help people in need (see section below on belief systems). Supriya, a 15 year old girl who was sexually abused in one previous workplace and then overworked and beaten in her next, explains that she takes refuge in God:

*"Whenever I get angry I used to go to God and pray that God removes anger from me because I did not like anger."*

In addition, children reacted to anger from their employers by crying (mainly on their own rather in front of the abuser) a reaction that is perhaps not a 'coping strategy' but did enable children to express their pain and suffering and, to some extent, like 17 year old Samjhana, to release frustration:

*"Whenever they scolded me I used to get angry, the words hurt me so I used to go to the toilet and cry there. Later on the sister of the house after knowing that I am crying, knocked on the door and I used to go out."*

Children in focus group discussions mentioned playing games (inside the home but also in the playground) as a way to forget their problems with their employers. They also mentioned concentrating on their work as a strategy for avoiding confrontation with employers.

In all of these reactions there was an acceptance, rarely articulated by children, of their powerlessness. 16 year old Bhagwati gave an insight into why she had to suppress her anger when she was beaten and scolded by her employer:

*"I'm staying in another person's house so I have to work properly even if they get angry as I have no option."*



Mahima an articulate and intelligent young woman (aged 19) who was sexually abused by her employer was conscious of the power dynamics between domestic worker and employer:

*"I get angry but I control myself I cannot do anything because I'm staying in another person's house so I need to tolerate everything."*

This sense of toleration or endurance was common to a number of children. For 11 year old Uma it was founded on a desire to please her mother whom she said was the most important person in her life. Uma said she did not want to do anything that might hurt her mother. So, when she faced scolding and beating from her employer and felt like running away from the workplace, she remembered what her mother had told her:

*"You are living with your aunt [employer] not with your mother, so you need to endure some difficulties."*

### **Coping with sexual abuse**

The emotion children expressed most in interviews was anger – and because many children didn't explicitly talk about their sexual abuse it was difficult to tell if their anger was related to the sexual abuse they had suffered or not. However from interviews where children did talk about how they coped with being sexually abused, a number of children stated that they kept silent or didn't tell anyone about their abuse – giving the impression that they simply tolerated it. But, as the next quote illustrates, from 19 year old Mahima, silence does not necessarily mean that children are not angry or that they will continue to allow abuse to take place:

*"Once the thing happened [sexual abuse], I felt guilty. Then I stayed alone and cried a lot. He did nothing to me at that time because he thought I could not do anything. Then while sobbing, I decided that once the chance came, I will show him."*

Mahima did manage to escape this abusive environment, after talking to a counsellor she was rescued from her workplace one year ago, is now reintegrated back with her family and is studying in secondary school.

In interviews, children explained that sometimes they told other people about the abuse but it didn't help them – although, in these cases, children often told family members who were very close to the abuser (such as the wife or daughter of the abuser) so it is not surprising that these people decided not to believe the children.

Children talked of avoiding the abuser or seeking out safe places such as a terrace (where people can see them). Ram Sharan is a 14 year old boy who was being groomed by a man in the neighbourhood who had started to show him pornographic materials and had invited him to watch movies in his home:

*"When I am alone at home, I do not go on the roof top, especially on holidays. When I saw that man in the neighbourhood I tried to keep myself inside the home and work. So, for the last few months I am not talking and visiting that man."*

Although many children were threatened with violence by their abusers if they spoke out about their abuse, a few children were able to stop abuse by threatening to tell others. 19 year old reintegrated

child, Mahima, who has been quoted many times before, was one of the few children who explained that she was able to stop abuse by threatening to tell the daughter of her abuser. However, as Mahima was sexually abused for three years it is not clear whether the cessation of her abuse was temporary or permanent.

## Belief Systems

Children in this study expressed a strong belief in God and talked about going to the temple or participating in cultural and religious festivals that are a regular occurrence in Nepali society. They also expressed strong beliefs in supernatural powers, ghosts and superstitions – some of which are deeply embedded in Nepali culture. The concept of karma is important to Nepali culture, karma comes from Hindu philosophy and concerns the cause and effect from previous lives to a person's current life. The concept of karma is based on a belief in reincarnation and re-birth, and, in particular that those who 'sin' during previous lives are re-incarnated (those who don't sin go to 'Mokchya' which is similar to the Christian concept of heaven) and have to face the effect of their sin in a previous life as pain and sorrow in their current life. Consequently, it is commonly believed in Hindu cultures that all the bad things that happen to a person are a direct result of sins they committed in a previous life – the punishment is that you have to face this karma – you cannot avoid it. Equally it is commonly believed that good things that happen can be seen as a result of good things you have done in previous lives – good karma.

Many children had a strong belief in God and frequently mentioned praying or going to the temple to pray (many houses have their own prayer room in Nepal) for help with their difficulties and as a source of solace and respite. In focus group discussions and interviews children said they prayed to God for help to achieve their goals, that God would help them to improve their situations.

15 year old Swasti was bullied so badly at school that the authorities intervened, she said that she didn't want to talk about her problems to anyone but she does go regularly to the temple:

*"When I go to the temple I ask God that I can perform better with my studies."*

Supriya, a 15 year old girl, visits the temple for refuge and to pray to Ganesh and Saraswati when she is scolded and beaten by her employer (Ganesh is the God of luck and Saraswati is the Goddess of knowledge):

*"When I pray to God I ask for a better life and for help in completing my education so that I can start up my own beauty parlour."*

Reintegrated child, Gita (aged 16) was sexually abused by two of her employers and says she feels sad about her life:

*"I believe in God so whenever I get sick I go to the temple or to God believing he will help me."*

Children often referred to their belief in religion (Hinduism) and in cultural practices and traditions that included the concept of 'destiny'. They also expressed a feeling that many things are beyond their control (connected the concept of 'karma' where there is nothing you can do about bad things

happening to you – you just have to face them). Children expressed a strong belief in destiny – the idea that they can't change their present circumstances (often circumstances of suffering).

Sharing her difficulties at work, 13 year old Sita said:

*"My father and brother never treated me well, they used to scold me and beat me. I left home and came to domestic work hoping for something better, but I faced it again. It seems that this is my Karma [fate] and I have to bear this."*

After suffering sexual abuse in two workplaces and promises of school enrolment by employers that never materialised 16 year old Gita appears pessimistic and cynical, saying she doesn't feel happy or sad in each workplace. She has come to the conclusion that everywhere it is the same – people will exploit you, they will not allow you to study and they make you do work that you don't like:

*"I feel bad about the present situation, nothing is good and I think maybe it's written in my fate so I'm suffering this."*

However Gita has found some solace in a phrase commonly used by Nepali people *Dukha Pachhi Sukha Aauchha*, translated as Dawn After Dusk which gives a sense of hope and optimism – that a bright day (future) always come after the darkness of night (current difficulties):

*"I feel bad when my employers remind me I am a domestic worker and prevent me from meeting my family. Still, I persevere because I know that there is 'Dawn after Dusk' (Dukha Pachhi Sukha Aauchha-)."*

And, in her story, Gita appears to have taken this concept to heart. She is now living in a centre for sexually abused girls, where she feels that she is not the only one to have faced these kinds of difficulties. She is also happy that she is learning to read and write and has a dream to become a tempo driver (a small taxi van often driven by women).

More commonly than Gita's initial pessimism, children in the study expressed hope for a better future. They believed that God will help them and this gave them hope. There appears to be a strong link between children accepting their current difficulties, partly because of their powerlessness as mentioned above, but also because of their belief that the situation will improve in the future. In this study the concept of 'destiny' was more closely associated to a positive outcome than a negative one. Unlike 'karma' where it could go both ways, destiny was more closely connected to hope and also to a sense of timing. One young woman, Mahima, who has since been reintegrated, looks back on her difficulties and reflects on this issue:

*"For anything to happen we need to wait for the proper time. In my life there were many problems for which I couldn't find the solution unless it was the right time that's why I find time very important."*

## **The importance of festivals**

Festivals are an important part of Nepali life, October is seen as festival month when a number of festivals take place, in particular, the festivals of Dashain and Tihar, when most of the population has a holiday (including domestic workers). This is when child domestic workers are most likely to be given time off to visit their family. However there are many other festival 'days' during the course of

the year; child domestic workers mentioned the festival of Teej in particular – which celebrates women and girls.

Children expressed a mixed view about festivals. The majority of children (13) mentioned that they liked festivals – they are given more freedom to play and enjoy the festivities, they are given better food, presents or money from their employers. Yuvraj, a 12 year old boy explains:

*“During festivals I get to go to the funfair and play on the swings which makes me forget my problems for a while.”*

This positive response from children seemed to be when the employing family allowed them to participate in the festival and they were treated more like one of the family than just a worker. Children mentioned forgetting their problems with employers during festival time. 15 year old Swasti expressed her happiness at the difference in the behaviour of her employer during festival time who, she complained, more commonly scolded and humiliated her:

*“In Teej [festival for women and girls] she gives me money to buy bangles while she was also buying bangles for others and I think she loves me although she scolds me a lot.”*

12 year old Manita left her first workplace as she was severely beaten, but she likes her current employers and enjoys festivals:

*“I like festivals because all the members have the day off and are in the house. We spend time being with each other and I enjoy it despite the work workload and problems faced.”*

However, eight children mentioned, in interviews, that festivals or holidays are a time when they remember their family and miss them, when they are not able to participate in rituals (go to the temple) and have a particularly heavy workload. Suresh is a 14 year old girl who had a heavy workload that made her feel like crying. She is too shy and afraid to complain to her employer and so she just carries on:

*“I don’t like festivals because there are many visitors and I have to work a lot which I don’t like.”*

Bhagwati is a 16 year girl who, despite complaining of daily physical and mental abuse by one of the members of her employing family, has a close relationship with another member of the family. Bhagwati said that she hopes to find someone who could help her with her heavy workload but who would also listen to her. Whenever she goes to the temple she prays to God to send her a friend who would help and listen to her:

*“I feel happy during festivals, because during festivals, especially Dashain and Holi, my employers buy me new clothes and even allow me to participate in all the events. Even while buying clothes they let me choose the clothes I like which makes me forget my past pains and be happy.”*

## Discriminatory cultural practices against girls

Children mentioned a number of cultural values that affected girls negatively. The expectation that the life of a girl is focused on preparing to become a wife and mother is connected to the fact that early marriage is still acceptable in Nepal (although this view is changing). Additionally, girls complained that their brothers and boys in general were given preferential treatment by parents. 19 year old Mahima, explains how girls are prepared, from an early age, for their role as wife and mother:

*“We [girls] are prevented from going to school during religious rituals because our mothers tell us that we have to learn the ritual or the mother-in-law will complain [that you are not a good daughter-in-law].”*

This treatment quite often affected the education of girls because boys’ education was seen as more important to the family as a whole. Mahima, in her interview, was particularly articulate about the different treatment of boys and girls:

*“The private schools have an English curriculum so my parents sent my brother to private school, so that he would get a good job, earn and look after the family...illiterate parents only educate their son and they are against educating daughters because they say educating a daughter is like watering a neighbour's tree.”*

Girls talked about not being allowed to go far from home (both their family home and the employer’s home). And a number of girls complained about a traditional practice whereby during menstruation girls and women should be treated as 'untouchables'. During this time girls are not allowed to enter the kitchen or living room (where the rest of the family will be), in particular, men or boys are not allowed to touch girls during menstruation or touch anything the menstruating girl touches – as menstruating women are considered to be impure. As a consequence girls mentioned not being able to work in the kitchen but being allowed to work outside and wash clothes. 15 year old Solochana explains how this impacted on her working day:

*“When I was menstruating I didn’t have to cook as the family didn’t eat food cooked by me during this time and called me untouchable. But I had to wash dishes and clothes outside the house.”*

## Internal Factors

Internal factors identified in categorisation of codes were connected to personal characteristics that children talked about in their interviews and group discussions, which they often considered to be personal strengths or skills. Many children in interviews talked about their aspirations or goals and these often connected to a positive attitude and an optimistic view of the future – despite current or past circumstances of adversity.

## Being positive

Many children, despite their difficulties, had positive attitudes. This mindset seemed to come from recognising their skills, strengths and good behaviour – often associated with their domestic chores. This data was quite often the result of questions from an introductory activity in life story interviews

(My Hand My Life) where children were asked to say what they are 'good at'. Children mentioned talents such as singing or dancing as well as chores they were good at or they shared their learning from being a domestic worker. For example, despite being worked very hard and being beaten by his employer, 14 year old Pradip identified skills he has developed from domestic work:

*"I learned how to wash dishes properly, stay neat and clean, cook proper food"*

Prasansa, a 14 year old girl, has always been strong willed and stands up for herself:

*"They used to wrongly blame me about things and didn't let me rest even for a while. I don't like people dominating me even though I am living in another person's home."*

She believed that one should be very strong willed and be ready to accept challenges. She gave her own example of how she managed to go to school though initially she felt embarrassed as she was older than her fellow students. She expressed a strong belief in her abilities:

*"I can dance very well, I cannot study so well, but I'm sure I can go forward with my dancing skills."*

Many children interviewed also talked of things they wanted to change about themselves (from another question in the My Hand My Life activity). As a result children identified a number of areas for self-improvement such as getting rid of bad habits or continuing with good behaviour. Solochana, in her interview, revealed that she is quite self-reflective. She said she doesn't like sharing her problems and feelings. She thought that feelings should be kept inside and shouldn't be told to other people. Similarly she recognised her weaknesses and said that she was proud, had a hot temper and did not listen to other people's suggestions:

*"The habit of getting angry is not good, if we get angry and speak people call us proud. So I always smile and speak to others."*

15 year old Swasti similarly mentions 'smiling' as a strategy to hide her difficulties rather than indicative of a positive outlook:

*"I usually smile whenever I speak to them. Even when they get angry with me I try and smile to them."*

It is worth noting that it is generally not acceptable in Nepal to show that you have a problem or that you are upset by something, consequently smiling is used as one of the strategies to hide this.

Some children recognise the internal nature of positive thinking. Again, Swasti revealed in the following statement that despite discouragement from others, positive thinking has an effect on children's agency:

*"Sometimes the family [employer] may not support you; they might ask you not to participate [in child clubs]. In such situations you can do it on your own, with your own interest from your heart."*

19 year old Mahima explained how positive thinking helps her to solve a problem, she sees her difficulties as challenges but recognises that she has the inner resources to overcome them:

*“Whenever anything happens I think it is for the best so whenever I have any problems I believe I can find a solution. I am not frustrated and I think, how can I get out of the problem? I think it's not a big problem, that's why I find my positive thinking is a strength.”*

Some children's positive thinking enabled them to see their problems as challenges. For example, 14 year old Prasansa, when talking about how she was humiliated by her employer said:

*“It all depends on oneself to accept and see them as challenges, we should be able to prove ourselves and find ways out of difficulties.”*

Later, in her interview she advises others to be strong willed and ready to accept challenges and gives the example of herself and how she managed to go back to school despite feeling embarrassed about being older than the other pupils in her class.

## Goals and aspirations

In life story interviews children discussed their goals and aspirations at two points – in the introductory activity (My Hand My Life) and in the final activity (Tomorrow I Will...). This produced rich data on children's goals and aspirations that appeared to be very important to most children interviewed.

When children were asked to explain their goals for their future many children talked about 'getting a better job' and identified jobs such as 'teacher', 'police' or 'driver' which appeared to be based on people they had met in their day-to-day life (who were role models in this respect). These children had strategies to achieve their goal, which tended to focus on studying hard and gaining the support of their family. 16 year old Sarita's response to a discussion about her future is typical of many child domestic workers in this study as she recognises that it requires studying hard:

*“I want to be a teacher....to be a teacher, the first and most important thing is studying.”*

18 year old Sweta believes the skills she has acquired as a domestic worker will stand her in good stead for a better job:

*“I think I can be a manager if I work in a hotel. I think people become managers by first being a housekeeper and doing this work, I think I can become a hotel manager too.”*

Other children mentioned, what may be considered less realistic goals – to be a chartered accountant, a doctor, a singer or a dancer and had no strategy to achieve their goals. In some cases they appeared not to have thought much about their goals and just mentioned a 'respectable' job.

For many children however, their goal concerned helping others in situations like themselves, which they saw as part of a process of becoming a 'better person'. Manita and Swasti are two girls who, despite their difficult circumstances, want to help others:

*"I like to help child victims like me, somebody whose parents are poor like mine. I learned all this by talking to friends."* Manita, aged 12 years

*"We should not be selfish, we should think about others, want to help others, be positive."* Swasti, aged 15 years

Children appeared to spend some time discussing their goals with friends. One 17 year old boy, Kumar, recognized that some aspirations are unattainable for children like him, he calls them 'high hopes', so he now has a more realistic goal of wanting to get a good job and earn his living:

*"I have heard that we cannot be doctors and engineers so I hope to study well, get a better job and be a good person. We cannot be doctors and engineers because for that we need lots of money and my parents cannot afford that."*

Another boy's goal setting combines two factors: his sense of duty to his family and his motivation to study hard. Kiran is currently 16 years old but he started work at the age of 12. His family is poor and his parents have had to take out a financial loan from a wealthy neighbour:

*"As the eldest son it's my responsibility towards my parents not to make them suffer and worry about this loan, at least I can give them a good and happy life after being employed at the government office. For this I need to study and here I am studying."*

## **Resilience and the Sample Group**

From coding and categorisation of data it appeared that reintegrated children demonstrated the highest levels of resilience out of the sample group. Children who did not have access to services demonstrated the lowest resiliency (resiliency being most apparent in the last five categories: sources of support, safety and protection strategies, coping strategies, belief systems and internal factors). However, it is important to note that this finding may be related to children's experience of talking about and reflecting on their lives rather than a clear indication of recovery or levels of resilience. Reintegrated children had much more experience of talking to others about their experiences than children who were accessing services or children who were not accessing services. Another influencing factor was the lack of multiple interviews, a restriction based on ethical concerns which meant children had just one opportunity to tell their story to researchers. Consequently no clear indication of levels of resilience can be accorded to sub-categories of the sample group.

The sample group was sub-divided into three groups of children, those who were already reintegrated with families of origin, into kinship care (extended family) or living independently. This group included a number of children who were living in a hostel, waiting to be reintegrated. Most of the reintegrated children were no longer working in domestic service but had experienced severe abuse and exploitation. The second group in the sample was children who were 'accessing services', this was made up of children who were currently working as domestic workers but had access to services and tended to be enrolled in state schooling. This group of children had been offered and taken-up various services such as counselling, skills development and legal services. The third group in the sample was children who were 'not accessing services'. This group of children were also working in domestic service but had only recently come into contact with CWISH (less than one



month before their interview), so would have joined a literacy class in the previous month but would not have had the opportunity to take-up other services (such as counselling, skills development etc.) by the time of the interview.

From these three groups, reintegrated children showed highest levels of resilience and children who were not accessing services showed lowest levels of resilience. This may well be because of restrictions to the research study as reintegrated children were found, in interview, to be better able to look back (reflect) on their lives than the other groups of children. In addition they required less prompting by researchers and gave much more detail to their stories, including more of their feelings and emotions instead of just the basic facts. They were generally older and had moved on from their most abusive experiences, so were on the road to recovery and were not currently living in an abusive environment which might have been a factor that inhibited other children from taking openly about their abuse. For example, in some cases children being interviewed were talking in their interview about abusive experiences that they were currently living with and would need to return to once the interview was over. All reintegrated children take part in regular counselling sessions as part of their reintegration process, in some cases these sessions last for many months, consequently reintegrated children were used to talking about their experiences and their feelings and were more familiar with an 'interview' context (researchers were all trained counsellors so used their counselling techniques to prompt discussion). Another factor supporting this finding is that, out of 47 children who took part in interviews, 43 children were provided with extra support from CWISH at the child's request after their interview. Over half of these children asked for counselling services.

## **Findings from Key Informant Interviews**

Interviews were held with 13 key informants who are all working with child domestic workers that have experienced abuse. Informants included NGO personnel, counsellors, child protection officers, doctors and policy makers. Interviews explored key informants' understanding of existing practices (for abused child domestic workers) and their recommendations for enhancing resilience. It should be noted that, although key informants were given a short explanation of resilience during their interview, they did not work under a 'resilience' framework.

## **Services provided to child abuse victims**

Key informants reported the following services currently on offer to child domestic workers who have experienced abuse and exploitation:

- Psycho -social counselling
- Free legal services
- Assessment of problems and referral services
- Therapies
- Medical services
- Rescue and reintegration of children to families
- Scholarships

## **Enabling factors**

Key informants identified 15 enabling factors for resilience. Internal factors included children having a trusting nature, a positive attitude, self-confidence (in their abilities and skills), tolerance and ambition (to achieve goals). External factors included the provision of immediate care and support (after abuse), provision of counselling, punishment of perpetrators, services that 'listen' to children, provision of a secure environment, services that enable children to feel 'free' (this was connected to secure environment). Societal factors included a close relationships and support from immediate family, having a role model, support and close relationships with kin networks.

## **Disabling factors**

Key informants identified ten disabling factors for resilience. Internal factors included self-blame, fear and guilt. External factors included poverty, threats from perpetrators and lengthy legal procedures. Societal factors included a lack of acceptance (of reintegrated children by their family), emotional deprivation, a background of domestic violence or separated parents and family neglect.

## **Recommendations**

Nine recommendations were identified from key informant interviews on ways to incorporate the findings from this research into practice. Recommendations from key informants ranged from broad statements on the need for governments and NGOs to develop child protection policies and procedures and address children's basic needs to more specific recommendations on developing 'children-friendly' spaces in the community, provision of psycho-social counselling services in all hospitals or the continuation of 'child clubs' in schools to enhance children's support networks.

## 6. Wellbeing

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The ultimate objective of this research project was to find out what helps children. In looking at the study cohort as it was originally divided, into children who were accessing services, those who were not accessing services and reintegrated children, it was difficult to ascertain which groups of children had achieved positive outcomes. Positive outcomes are different to resilience. The research team wanted to make a simple analysis of the data collected in terms of children's wellbeing. Which groups of children were 'doing well' and which were not? And present it alongside analysis on resilience. It is hoped the wellbeing analysis will add to, rather than necessarily reinforce, the conclusions on resilience. Additionally, that the results and conclusions from the wellbeing analysis can be adapted to practice for those supporting child domestic workers.

### Method

An assessment of individual children's wellbeing was made using data from 46 life story interviews with children and case files kept by CWISH. The assessment focused on whether children were '*doing well*' or '*not doing well*' through identification of key indicators of wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Key indicators covered two areas in particular: children's living situation and children's behaviour. The wellbeing assessment was made by the Project Co-ordinator, Rakshya Ojha, and a Psycho Social Counsellor, Shobha Shreshtha, who reviewed case files and produced a written statement for each child on their wellbeing. Wellbeing assessments included reference to different domains of children's lives such as their working environment, progress in their schooling, relationships with family, friends or people they are living with as well as children's health and demeanour. Case files on children included data such as notes from counselling sessions with children (the majority of children had undergone counselling) and progress reports from teachers or NGO personnel supporting the child. Additionally data also came from the children themselves – from meetings with the child or phone calls between the child and their counsellor.

Individual tables summarizing data from children's interviews were amalgamated with wellbeing assessments to aid comparison. Wellbeing assessments were made in November 2013, approximately 15 months after children had been interviewed.

### Results

Of the 41 children assessed as *doing well* 14 children were not accessing services (i.e. they were not receiving support from NGOs) at the time of their interview, 16 children had access to services and 11 children were already on a reintegration programme (a total of 27 children who were doing well had access to services and support). Of the five children assessed as *not doing well*; three were children who were not accessing services, one was a reintegrated child and one was a child who had access to services.

Assessments highlighted two key indicators of wellbeing: firstly, a behavioural indicator regarding children's ability to reduce their feelings of fear, anxiety and anger and, secondly, a situational

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<sup>9</sup> One assessment is missing as no case file exists for the child interviewed.

indicator regarding children's progress in their studies (or in some cases simply their regular attendance of school).

24 of the children *doing well* were displaying one or both of these indicators in the assessment. In contrast, none of children assessed as *not doing well* were attending school.

A typical example of those children assessed as *doing well* is 19 year old Mahima, who was assessed as 'doing well' displayed the two key indicators of wellbeing. Mahima's assessment states that a year previously she was suffering from anxiety attacks and failed her year 10 exams at school. During her interview, she spoke of the sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of one of her employers. At the time of her interview she had already been placed on a reintegration programme and was receiving intensive support – living in a specialist hostel (for sexually abused girls) and taking in part in regular counselling sessions. In notes from the counselling sessions it was evident that Mahima felt insecure about her future and, in particular, displayed anxiety about sexual relationships – which she articulated as being worried about marriage and the shame and stigma she might face from any future husband should she tell him of her history of abuse. Whenever the issue of marriage was raised she felt panicked and nervous. However, she is now doing well. She mentions, on her regular visits to CWISH, that she believes this year of support helped her to improve her situation. She has started attending school regularly and is now top of her class in grade 11. She visits CWISH often and was involved in another research project run by CWISH as an enumerator where staff reported that she performed well. She says:

*"These days I don't get panicked over that incident of rape, I am happy now, and I don't get insecure about anything. The regular support I've had and counselling has helped me recover from my trauma."*

### **Behavioural indicators of wellbeing**

Children's ability to overcome feelings of fear, anxiety and anger were the most prominent behavioural indicators of wellbeing.

For example, Gita who was 16 at the time of her interview and had been sexually, physically and verbally abused by her employer and, as a result, displayed great fear in the company of others. She was nervous and would break down when she met people (she cried, was afraid in front of them and could not speak). She said that all people were the same and that she is afraid of them. Her condition has now improved. She has been provided with counselling for emotional support, her counsellor stated that she has started making friends in the hostel where she is living and now seems much happier. The child herself says:

*"I am not afraid these days, the friends in the hostel help me share my problems and I feel light."*

Rita, who was aged 20 at the time of her interview, had anxiety problems resulting from sexual exploitation by her employers. She had been sexually abused frequently without the use of contraceptives and was physically weak; she was convinced she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease and would not live long. In her interview she mentioned this anxiety:

*"I was sexually abused and I frequently get headache and I know I am suffering from chronic disease."*

In a recent meeting with Rita, however, she appeared calm and says this is because of the support she has received through the reintegration programme, in particular, the health check-ups which have confirmed she is healthy and well. This has reduced her level of anxiety – she no longer has a fear of death.

13 year old Sita was attacked and abducted by a man when she ran away from her employer and was then raped continuously for two days. For a long time she was full of rage. She wanted to punish the culprit and consequently had strong feelings of anger and rage and a short temper with people in general. She recognized that she could not control her temper and, in particular, had feelings of hatred towards all men. Sita was provided with counseling services for about six months and her counsellor has observed that her anger has reduced. Currently she is living in a hostel and is going to school regularly. Her hostel caregiver has noticed the change in her behaviour and says that although she still complains about things – her anger has reduced to a large extent.

16 of the 41 children *doing well* were identified as ‘appearing happy’, similarly 15 were identified as ‘confident or extrovert’ and a smaller number of children displayed similar positive behaviours (such as being ‘open’ or being ‘strong’). For example, 13 year old boy, Bishnu has a scholarship to a private school in his community and reports from teachers indicate that he is happy at the school, is making friends and is seen playing with them regularly. In addition, he has talked about being happy during counselling sessions.

Assessments identified that the key behavioural indicator for children who were *not doing well* was mental instability. For example, Yuvraj, who was 12 years old at the time of his interview is currently *not doing well*. His assessment states that he appears mentally unstable, cannot remember anything he is taught and does not follow the rules in his hostel – consequently he is not able to continue his schooling. Yuvraj does not maintain personal hygiene and is reported by his counsellor and hostel caregiver as very impatient.

Other factors that indicated a child was *not doing well* were neglect by their family and a child showing signs of anxiety, fear or behavioural problems (such as rudeness or promiscuity). For many children family neglect was due to alcoholism. In Sushila’s case this appeared to result in behavioural problems as well as an unsafe living/working situation. Sushila went into domestic work after the death of her mother but when she was abused in one of her work places her alcoholic father was unable to care for her. Consequently, she had to continue working in this abusive environment and has become rude (verbally abusive) to others.

### **Situational indicators of wellbeing**

Assessments identified that the living situation for many children had changed since the time of their interview. 12 of the 41 children who were *doing well* were identified as reintegrated with family (sometimes this was extended family such as kinship care). For example, Prapti has been reintegrated with her family in Dolakha, she regularly calls her counsellor and reports that she is happy with her family and attending school regularly. Mahima has been reintegrated through kinship care, she no longer works as a domestic worker, she is now a student and is top of her class.

Three of the five children *not doing well* had also been reintegrated, although, as Sujata’s case highlights, reintegration with family was not successful. Sujata was initially reintegrated with her

family but she returned to Kathmandu and has started working again – she says she prefers the city and prefers working to studying so is living independently from her family.

Eight of the 41 children *doing well* were living in a hostel. However, for children who were *not doing well* this proportion doubled (two of the five children lived in hostels). Equally, children's work situations showed a similar pattern. Double the proportion of children who were *doing well* were working in comparison to children who were *not doing well*. Furthermore, most of the children that were *doing well* said they had supportive employers whereas none of the children that were *not doing well* reported this.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, children that were *doing well* reported they felt cared for or supported, a small number of them stated they were financially independent or had plans to become financially independent and two girls had got married. For example, 17 year old Kamal is now living independently, and, after receiving skills training is earning for himself:

*"I had lost my confidence...but today I find myself strong and confident."*

In general, children that were *doing well* were living in situations with higher levels of support; this support came from family, from organisations or from employers.

**Schooling:** most of the children assessed as *doing well* were attending school regularly. The children themselves or their teachers reported on improvements in their grades, regular attendance at school and the acquisition of friends. Additionally, a number of children were involved in after school clubs where they were receiving skills training and were involved in empowerment activities that appeared to give them increased confidence. Success at school was a strong motivational factor for many children in this study. It was the 'push' factor for many children who voluntarily chose to enter domestic service and 'working hard' at their studies was also seen as the key route out of domestic work for many children – the only opportunity to improve their living standards:

*"Because if you are educated you become aware and no-one can take advantage of you."* Prapti, 9 year old girl who is 'doing well'

11 year old Uma was sexually abused by her father and was sent to work with her aunt in Kathmandu so that she could attend school. However she was working for three years before she started attending an outreach centre (informal school):

*"When I asked my aunt to admit me to school she told me not to mention school again. Whatever I have studied until now, that's enough."*

She says that she finds the environment at school safe and she has many friends. This environment allowed her to share her story of her sexual abuse with her teacher, which she had been unable to do before:

*"My teacher motivated me to study."*

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that in all cases the 'supportive employers' were one of two groups – employers who had supported children when they had been abused by a visitor to the employing family, or when children had been abused by employers themselves, the 'supportive employers' they talked about were new employers.

She is now attending school regularly and is a member of a school child club, which she says has helped her develop her confidence. She wants work for the betterment society after her studies.

Notably, none of the children assessed as *not doing well* were attending school. Although the reasons for not studying varied, all the children who were *not doing well* had attended school initially (for two or three years, usually before they started working) but, at some point in their working lives, had been disallowed from attending school by their employers. The case of 12 year old Sushila highlights the difficulties of re-starting school when children have been forced to leave for some time. Sushila, who was sent to work in her relatives' house after she was raped in her origin community, went to school for three years but dropped out as her employer didn't allow her to study. However, even with support to study at an outreach centre, she was not able to keep up. As Sushila becomes older she has lost interest in her education and wants to work instead. Currently she is neither working nor studying.

## Analysis

In terms of the general background of children among the study cohort, older children (aged 14 years and above) were doing better than younger children.<sup>11</sup> Girls were doing marginally better than boys<sup>12</sup> and children who had access to services were doing better than those who did not.<sup>13</sup>

## Children's experience of abuse

18 of the 46 children interviewed had experienced sexual abuse (either they mentioned sexual abuse during their interview or it was known from case files that they had experienced sexual abuse) and 24 had experienced physical abuse: the two most common forms of abuse identified in the research. Additionally, nine children had experienced two forms of abuse (physical, sexual or emotional abuse) with just three children identified as having experienced all three forms of abuse and one child where no abuse was identified.

In terms of wellbeing and children's experience of sexual abuse, 22 children who were *doing well* had experienced sexual abuse and out of those children, 11 had also experienced physical abuse. Children who were *not doing well* had, in general, experienced similar incidences of physical abuse but reported, proportionally, much higher incidences of sexual abuse and even higher frequencies of multiple abuses than children who were *doing well*.<sup>14</sup>

Children in the research appeared to have the same kinds of reactions to abusive situations they faced – whether they were doing well or not and whether they had faced sexual abuse or not. Predominantly, children said that they were afraid, that they were angry and that they were upset (they felt unhappy or cried) about their experiences. Children who had experienced sexual abuse, however, talked more about fate and destiny having a role to play in their lives than children who had not experienced sexual abuse. In addition, four children mentioned in their interviews that they had wanted to die. All of these children were 'doing well' and three of the four had experienced

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<sup>11</sup> 15 of the 18 children aged between 8-13 years old, 21 of the 22 children aged 14-18 years old and three of the four young people aged 18-25 years old were doing well.

<sup>12</sup> (31 of the 35 girls interviewed and nine of the 10 boys interviewed were assessed as doing well).

<sup>13</sup> 14 of the 17 children who were not accessing services, 15 of the 16 children accessing services and 11 of the 12 reintegrated children were doing well.

<sup>14</sup> Four of the five children *not doing well* had experienced sexual abuse, two had experienced violence and one child had experienced all three forms of abuse.

sexual abuse. In one case, these two issues were connected. 16 year old Sita said during her interview that she wanted to kill herself after she had been abducted from the streets and raped (she had run away from her employer) and that she continued to have suicidal thoughts when she thought of the hurt caused to her by her family's abuse and neglect. She believed these awful experiences have caused 'bad karma' for her.

### Where children found support

Despite this rather bleak picture of the abusive situations children found themselves in, it is clear from their interviews that children secured support from a variety of places. The data suggests that children who were *doing well* identified more strengths and skills in themselves than children who were doing less well. Equally, children who had access to services identified marginally more strengths and skills in themselves than those who did not<sup>15</sup>. The most important strength for the group of 41 children *doing well* was empathy, which children expressed as love for others or a desire to help others (particularly others like themselves). This strength was only expressed by children who had access to services. Quite often children's empathy was evident from their goal or dream to become a social worker or doctor such as 13 year old boy, Milan, who stated in his interview that he dreams of helping low-caste and vulnerable people and particularly children who have no parents – to support their education.

Another important strength identified by children who were *doing well* was their capacity to speak out, to speak their mind or their ability to express themselves (verbally). 11 year old girl, Uma, said in her life story interview: *"I am quite frank. I love to talk with people. People want to have friendship with me."* Uma was assessed as *doing well* and appeared to be able to express herself well both with her parents and her employer. In her interview for example, she says she talked with her parents about domestic work and stated the working conditions she was prepared to accept if she were to be sent to Kathmandu to work. Also, Uma explains that she speaks directly to her employer, telling her to improve her bad habits such as drinking and smoking. 'Speaking out' was often articulated as children sharing their problems with others and was more frequently mentioned by children who had experienced sexual abuse.

Additionally, when translated into the actions taken by children, the data suggests that the most frequently mentioned protection strategy for children was to 'speak out' and this was the case for all children – whether they were *doing well* or not, as well as for those who had experienced sexual abuse or not. For example, 16 year old Gita was initially afraid of speaking out against her (physical and sexual) abuse and thought people would blame her and think badly of her. However, when she spoke to neighbours and members of the employing family about her abuse they told her to kick and shout if it happens again. By complaining about her abuse she was able to change employers a number of times. She ran away from her last employer and was placed in a shelter for abused girls.

The data seems to show that a key motivating factor for all the children interviewed was the idea of self-improvement. Most often children articulated this as a goal to get a better job.

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<sup>15</sup> An average of 2.07 strengths and/or skills was mentioned by children with no access to services as opposed to an average of 2.91 strengths and/or skills mentioned by children who had access to services.



12 year old boy, Prem believes that, currently, being a child domestic worker is his best option. But he has noticed men in his community who are engineers and wants to follow their example and become an engineer – he says he will work hard to achieve his dream.

16 year old Hridaya aspires to become a police officer and fulfil the wishes of her grandparents. Although some of her family members do not agree with her choice of profession she says in her interview that she has made up her mind and will work hard to show her family that she made the correct decision.

In some cases the job children had set their hearts on required a measure of empathy (social worker, teacher, police officer) where children could help those like themselves. This connects to the key strength identified by children *doing well* of empathy. Furthermore, children that were *doing well* focused equally on getting a better job and their commitment to study whereas children who were *not doing well* placed far less importance on their education (and none of these children were identified as attending school).

These connecting attributes of wellbeing are well illustrated by 15 year old boy Mahesh who states in his interview that he regards hard work as the key to success and education as the most important step in achieving independence and success. Although Mahesh acknowledges that he needs to change some of his bad habits (such as hanging around with friends and being careless with money) he says that if he is to achieve his dream of becoming a teacher one day (a profession he considers to be noble) he also has to work hard. He believes it is the duty of those fortunate enough to have an education to provide others with such opportunities.

An interesting idea suggested from the data is that although a high proportion of children interviewed had goals of a better job, if they were not able to make progress on achieving these goals their wellbeing appeared to suffer. This can be evidenced in interviews by the commitment shown by children who were *doing well* to their schooling and in wellbeing assessments by subsequent improvements in grades (or more regular school attendance) for the same group of children.

Children who were *doing well* most frequently cited a member of their employing family or an NGO (this includes teachers in informal schools) as a supportive person for them. For example, a number of children said that the sons or daughters of their employers protected them from beatings by their employer – such as 13 year old girl Fulmaya who said in her interview that her employer's daughter protected her from being thrashed by her employer. Sometimes, however, the support was in the form of help with homework or domestic chores as illustrated by 16 year old girl, Writu, who worked in the hotel that her employers owned. She says in her interview that when her employers scolded her and beat her she stopped herself from retaliating by thinking about her employers' innocent daughter, who she said was very supportive and often helped her to do her chores in the hotel.

It is not particularly surprising that children *doing well* quoted personnel from NGOs as supportive in their interviews, given that, overall, children with access to services were doing better than those without (and would therefore have more contact with NGO staff). For practitioners, this finding does, therefore, reinforce the importance of finding ways for child domestic workers to access services and, in particular, that personnel in these services can be a key support to children experiencing abuse.

However, it is also interesting to note that 13 children *doing well* stated during their interview that a member of the employing family was a supportive person for them. In contrast, children who were *not doing well* most frequently cited neighbours as supportive rather than their employers, such as 12 year old girl Sushila who said in her interview that her neighbour gave her advice and helped with some of the outside chores. Equally, neighbours were also more frequently cited by children who had experienced sexual abuse.

This research identified that most of the abuse of children in this cohort was perpetrated in the home of the employer, by a member of the employing family or a friend of the employing family.<sup>16</sup> For example, 15 year old girl, Swasti stated in her interview:

*"My employer used to severely scold me. I used to get scolded for everything – if I did anything wrong, if I got late home from school. She was very strict."*

During this time, however, Swasti says her employer's husband and daughter were very supportive to her – they would answer back to the employer's scolding and accuse her of treating Swasti badly.

This finding seems to suggest that children who were *doing well* managed to find support when they were in abusive situations in one of two ways; they found support from elsewhere within the employing family or were able to move to a new and more supportive employing family. What is apparent is the key role that the employing family played in child domestic worker's lives – in particular the protective and supportive role that different members of the employing family could play in bringing positive outcomes for child domestic workers' well-being.

## Conclusion

From an analysis of the wellbeing of children interviewed in this research it can be concluded that, despite the fact that the vast majority of children had experienced some form of abuse in their lives, equally, a large majority of children in this study had positive outcomes and were *doing well*.

Assessments highlighted two key indicators of wellbeing: firstly children's ability to reduce their feelings of fear, anxiety and anger and, secondly, children's progress in their studies (or in some cases simply their regular attendance of school).

Child domestic workers were less likely to have positive outcomes if they experienced sexual abuse rather than physical abuse. However children's key behavioural responses to all forms of abuse were fear, anger and emotional upset by their experiences. Children who had experienced sexual abuse placed more importance on fate or destiny and were more likely to have suicidal thoughts. Wellbeing assessments identified that where children had been able to address these behavioural responses to abuse (particularly fear, anxiety and anger) their wellbeing increased.

A key determinant of wellbeing appeared to be children's ability to speak out. This was particularly important for children who had experienced sexual abuse; sharing their problems with others was identified as both a key strength and a support strategy among children who were *doing well*.

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<sup>16</sup> Case files indicate that 30 of the 47 children interviewed had experienced sexual abuse in their workplace: 22 children were abused by a guest of the employer (sometimes a member of the extended family of the employer), four abused by their employer and four by neighbours.

One motivating factor for all children in this research project was the idea of gaining a better job. Children who were *doing well*, gave examples of wanting to become a social worker, teacher or police officer in order to help others like themselves which drew on one of their key strengths – a sense of empathy. However, it was particularly when children had been able to make progress in achieving this goal (through study) that they appeared to achieve better outcomes.

Child domestic workers in this research were, characteristically, dependent on their employers and it was employers (or people connected to the employer's family such as friends and extended family members) who perpetrated most of the abuse against them. However, despite their isolated position, children in this cohort turned to different members of their employing family for support when they needed it. Consequently it appears the employing family provides a nexus of both abuse and support. While the employing family perpetrated most of the abuse against child domestic workers found by this study, some members of the employing family also played a protective or supportive role for abused children and helped bring positive outcomes for child domestic workers' wellbeing.

# 7. Themes

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## Introduction

In the generation of resiliency themes for this study the research team have been conscious of the changing definition of resilience. As there is no consensus on a definition, certain characteristics of resilience, as outlined by Bruce and Macdonald were found to be particularly pertinent to our discussions. These were that for resilience to exist it needs more than 'positive qualities' or 'resources' – active use of these resources is required. Also, that resilience should be seen as an individual's interaction with the environment and context, and that it needs adversity to develop (Bruce & MacDonald, 2007).

It should be noted that, in the development of themes, the research team has consciously looked for resiliency in children's response to situations of sexual abuse and exploitation. Although child domestic workers face many adversities, they are particularly vulnerable to abuse by their employing family. Consequently we have focused our attention on the situations of abuse that children faced and within this frame concentrated more closely on situations of sexual abuse. In general, and particularly in Nepali society, children rarely talk explicitly about sexual matters. However, in making use of selective sampling for the study as well as stringent ethical guidelines, we found that children were able to talk with a mixture of ambiguity and frankness about their experiences of sexual abuse.

In our discussions we developed five themes, which can be summarised as follows:

### **Theme 1: Someone to confide in**

Children in this study showed a strong urge to share their problems with a 'confidante'; to offload their pain, to gain support and to help them develop a strategy to protect themselves from further harm. Children were particularly conscious of the need to confide in someone when it came to sexual abuse, consequently they made careful assessment of potential confidantes and the consequences of sharing a problem that could have a serious negative impact on their lives.

### **Theme 2: Dawn after Dusk: hope enables children to endure hardship**

Child domestic workers were found enduring hardship at their workplace in the hope of a better future, both for themselves and for their family. Children demonstrated that they were able to change their understanding of the difficulties they faced and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome, taking charge of their destiny by striving for their goals.

### **Theme 3: Positive attitude and self confidence**

Many children in this research displayed positive attitudes to themselves, to domestic work in general, and to the particular difficulties they faced. This positive outlook gave children confidence that they could influence or change the situations in which they found themselves.

#### **Theme 4: Ability to assess the situation and develop a protection strategy**

Many children in this study had the ability to assess situations where they were at risk of abuse or harm and to develop strategies to protect themselves and ensure their safety. Children demonstrated a keen ability to assess and navigate the power differentials between abuser and victim, domestic worker and employer.

#### **Theme 5: Participation in festivals enables reconciliation**

Children's participation in cultural festivals can be a time of opportunity for child domestic workers; a moment of respite from the daily drudge of domestic work and a time when they can make the best of their situation. It also presents an opportunity for children to reconcile their difficulties with their employers, and has the potential to be a pivotal moment in their lives.

### **Theme One: Someone to Confide In**

*"Along with the grandmother I told those things [incidences of abuse] to my friend and she said that 'yes the man is like that, even he tried to touch my body before.'"*

Karishma, a 16 year old girl

Children in this study showed a strong urge to share their problems with a 'confidante'; to offload their pain, to gain support and to help them develop a strategy to protect themselves from further harm. Children were particularly conscious of the need to confide in someone when it came to sexual abuse, consequently they made careful assessment of potential confidantes and the consequences of sharing a problem that could have a serious negative impact on their lives.

Someone to confide in or a 'confidante' is defined by children in this study as a person with whom the child has a positive relationship and in whom they can share problems of a personal nature. Children mentioned the importance of their trust in a confidante and that whatever they share with this person remains private. The key difference between a 'confidante' and a 'supportive person' appeared to be that, although both care and love the child, the confidante is more likely to stand up for the child, and is someone who will not panic or become stressed easily when the child shares a problem of a personal nature with them. Children mentioned looking for these characteristics before they felt safe enough to share a problem of a personal nature with someone. There was a shared understanding but unexpressed hope or expectation that a confidante would be able to help them with their problems.

19 year old Mahima, talking about her experience of sexual abuse explains:

*"initially I was confused about what he was doing, later on I realised he was doing all bad things and when I asked him to stop he said 'who are you to stop me at my home'...I was scared of telling this to anyone as it might be my own fault and also my schooling may stop because I may have to leave the house. But one day in a school program I met a CWISH counsellor and planned to tell her. So I did."*

Children from two focus group discussions talked about the importance of friends as confidantes rather than adults; that their friends understand what they are feeling and can teach them things they do not know or help them to solve problems. Additionally, children from the advisory

committee chose 'someone to confide in' as the theme that had most resonance for them. Bidhya, a 15 year old girl, expresses the support that children are hoping for from someone they confide in:

*"I used to get scolded and beaten by my employer for not working properly and they always complained about my work. At that time I used to stay quiet and felt like going home. Later on, I shared this with my elder sister and my friend who gave me emotional support. This helped me a lot."*

The majority of children in this study reported that they confided in friends living in similar circumstances to their own (35%), family members (20%), particularly mothers and siblings, NGO personnel (20%), teachers (15%) and lastly their employer's family (10%), typically the spouse or children of the employer.

The problems that children shared with their confidantes can be divided into four categories, but overwhelming related to incidences of sexual abuse:

- **Fear of sexual assault (45%):** children were most likely to want to speak to a confidante when they were afraid they might be sexually assaulted. Children reported confiding in someone when they were being sexually harassed, being shown pornography, when someone was using vulgar words and foul gestures towards them or touching their body in a sexual way.
- **Attempted sexual assault (15%):** children confided in friends and family when someone had attempted to sexually assault them but had been stopped by circumstances. This is connected to the previous category as children confided in someone before abuse had taken place.
- **Sexual assault (30%):** children confided in someone after they had been sexually assaulted and tended to confide in adults rather than children in these cases.
- **Other forms of abuse (10%):** children reported they confided in someone when they were physically abused such as being dragged down the stairs, being pinched or slapped, and also when they were emotionally abused, for example through name calling or being prevented from visiting their families.

Predominantly children sought a confidante before sexual abuse had taken place (60%), when they were afraid and relatively sure that abuse would take place in the future.

In order to share such a sensitive and private problem as sexual abuse with another person children said they first needed to feel at ease and safe with this person, and believe that this person would care for them and protect them. Children in interviews and, particularly, children involved in the production of the film 'Meena's story' (developed on this theme) gave clear advice to others regarding confidantes:

*"You should not keep your problems to yourself, you need to find someone who you are able to trust and will keep your problems confidential you should share your problems with them."*

Before abuse happened children tended to confide in their friends – other children who would sympathise with their problems, who could confirm their fears (of sexual abuse – as indicated by the

first quote from Karishma, above) and with whom they could discuss a protection strategy. After abuse happened however, children tended to confide in adults – perhaps recognising that adults are in a better position to take action with the authorities than children.

After repeated sexual assault by a stranger, 18 year old Sweta recalls how, in shock, and not knowing what to do, she desperately needed someone to confide in:

*“After being raped I was walking on the street without knowing what to do. I found the brother [of her employer] I told him everything about what happened to me and he took me to the police and filed a case over there. He [the employer] was supportive to me at my workplace as well.”*

The sharing of problems and difficulties with a confidante is a ‘purposive action’ by children. Although children may not always actively seek someone to confide in, they nevertheless appeared to make careful assessment of suitable candidates using the following criteria:

- A potential confidante should be in regular contact with the child;
- They should prove that they are trustworthy and supportive and; and
- They should be in a similar situation and context to the child or should have a good understanding of what the child is going through.

In interviews children often talked of this assessment process in terms of people who had betrayed their trust in the past. However, as the urge to share their problems was strong for the children in this study, they often used this betrayal to make adjustments to their assessment, as the case of 17 year old Samjhana illustrates, and continue in their pursuit to find a suitable person to confide in.

Samjhana was sexually abused by her male employer and confided in the daughter of her employer, expecting advice and support from her. However, she was scolded by the daughter and told to keep quiet. Although Samjhana was sexually abused again at her next place of work, this time she chose to confide in a neighbour, who was able to help her to leave the workplace:

*“That old man [employer], he came to my room at night and pulled off my blankets and asked me to go to his room, he asked me take off my clothes and forcefully wanted to do something which I didn't like and I refused. So I screamed and he locked me in the room for two days and after two days I went down to the neighbour and told him everything and he said if he does it again, tell it to us and we'll call the police.”*

Although the isolation and lack of social contact with the world outside the employing family is a barrier for child domestic workers trying to find a confidante, children identified other hindrances particular to sharing problems of sexual abuse with someone:

- Children feared that their confidante might get stressed or worry about them too much (this was in particular reference to family members);
- Children feared that if they were found (by the abuser) to be sharing their problems with others, they would be prevented from going to school, going to the shops or the playground;
- Children had confusing feelings about their abuse, feelings of guilt, and in particular a fear that they would be blamed and humiliated if their abuse was made public; and

- Children had threats of physical punishment from their abusers if they told others of their abuse.

Furthermore, a small number of children did not share their problems of sexual harassment or abuse because they were not aware that these actions were abusive.

When asked why she didn't share her problems with others 18 year old Sweta answered:

*"I didn't talk about the violence that happened to me at my workplace; the more I shared with others the more I would be beaten, so I kept it to myself."*

In their assessment of a suitable confidante, children needed to strike a balance between the nature of the issue (abuse) they wanted to discuss and the likelihood of how their chosen confidante would react. In addition, they had to bear in mind the consequences that their confidante's reaction might hold for them in the future.

Girls in focus group discussions highlighted a key inhibiting factor for the children in this study when it came to sharing problems of a sexual nature. They reported the danger that if a girl talks about sexual harassment by a particular boy, friends are not sympathetic and, conversely, can sometimes spread rumours about the girl having an affair with the boy (i.e. that she has encouraged the relationship).

The theme of 'finding someone to confide in' fits neatly into a well known resilience strategy; that of seeking the emotional support of and disclosure towards a third person – a confidante. This strategy, however is dependent on the quality of the support and advice provided by the 'third person'. Child domestic workers in this study overcame numerous hurdles in their pursuit of a confidante. This included their lack of social contact with people outside the employing family and the 'stigma' associated with sexual abuse, which can lead to particularly negative consequences for children if their confidante betrays their trust. Children seemed to be acutely aware of these factors in the careful assessment they made of potential confidantes, holding out until they were sure of the quality of support and advice they might receive from a confidante. The fact that children tended to confide in someone before serious abuse had happened (when they were afraid of sexual assault) implies, firstly, that they are cognisant to the grooming behaviours and warning signs of sexual abuse and, secondly, that they are able to project past a present situation and make an active assessment of their risk in the future. In this theme, children demonstrated a keen understanding of the consequences of sharing sensitive information with an 'outsider' and great skill in identifying and analysing key criteria for suitable candidates.

## **Theme Two: Dawn after Dusk: Hope Enables Children to Endure Hardship**

*"I feel bad when my employers remind me I am a domestic worker and prevent me from meeting my family. Still, I persevere because I know that there is 'Dawn after Dusk' (Dukha Pachhi Sukha Aachha)." Gita, 16 year old girl*

Child domestic workers were found enduring hardship at their workplace in the hope of a better future, both for themselves and for their family. Children demonstrated that they were able to



change their understanding of the difficulties they faced and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome, taking charge of their destiny by striving for their goals.

In Nepali society, there is belief that 'hardship exists to sharpen one's ability' and that 'hardship' (which can be seen as a dark night), exists and precedes 'reward' (a bright day). Hence the expression 'dawn after dusk'. Furthermore, it is believed that a bright day is inevitable; it will come sooner or later. This optimism in the face of hardship is evidenced in many of the Nepali fables (stories with a moral lesson) told to children of successful people who have overcome hardship and endured difficulties.

In this study, 18 children interviewed and 56 children from focus groups<sup>17</sup> expressed their hopes for a brighter future, despite coping with the day-to-day reality of significant hardship. Children's understanding of hope, in this sense, was expressed as confidence in a future that is more open, unknown and largely beyond their control. Many children expressed this simply as 'a better life', and many connected 'a better life' to a better job, which they believed could be achieved through a good education.

Suresh, a 14 year old girl, keeps quiet when she is being scolded or humiliated by her employer until the situation returns to normal:

*"I am here to study and should not do anything that may harm my education."*

14 year old Prasansa wants to be a flight attendant, although she is aware this dream will be difficult and expensive to realise she has a strong belief that persevering in her work and studies will help her to get the money she needs to make her dream come true. She says this is why she tolerates all the scolding and abusive behaviour of her employers.

Children's attachment to their goals was a strong motivational factor in enabling them to endure their current hardships and 'hang on until dawn'. Only two children in interviews failed to mention a specific goal they were aiming for in their lives. And, although Prasansa's goal is, as she admits, a little unrealistic for a child domestic worker, the vast majority of children (36 of 47 children interviewed) had more realistic goals that were based on the people they met in their day-to-day lives such as teachers, social workers, drivers or restaurant owners.

### **Positive support reinforces hope**

Children stated that positive care and support from their employers gave them hope that they would realise their goals and reinforced their determination to achieve them. Overwhelmingly, this support was seen by children as access to education (75%) facilitated by their employer. A further 38% of children interviewed described support as access to health services. Marginally fewer children saw support as 'fair treatment' by their employer such as being given adequate food, clothes, and decent accommodation or simply not being scolded and beaten when they made mistakes. Seven children interviewed also mentioned that they sought advice from their employers in times of difficulty. Additionally, children in interviews and focus groups felt supported when employers actively helped them with their domestic work (but particularly school work), provided economic support to their families or just gave children time to play.

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<sup>17</sup> From interviews this consisted of six former child domestic workers, eight children accessing services and four children who were not accessing services. From focus group discussions this consisted of, 28 girls and 28 boys.

Implicit in this long list of support from their employer, however, was a fear keenly felt by children; that should they leave their employer, they could lose a key opportunity to realise their goals – that of access to education. This fear appeared to contribute to children's capacity to endure hardship.

17 year old girl, Samjhana, despite being beaten and suffering sexual abuse at the hands of a previous employer, is hopeful that she will open a tailor shop by saving a little money:

*"I need to continue to work and save my salary so that I can open a tailor shop in the future. Therefore, enduring some difficulties is not a big problem".*

All the children interviewed in this study had faced various degrees of violence, abuse, discrimination and degrading or cruel behaviour and yet half of these children stated with some conviction that they had hope for a better future.

### **Belief in God and hope**

Children often turned to God to help them realise their dreams and give them hope, in particular, children mentioned praying for help with their studies and their hardships. Almost half the children interviewed in this study talked of praying for a better situation in life.

In focus group discussions children mentioned they visit the temple to pray that God will help them get out of trouble, help them study or help them to achieve their goal. Surpriya, a 15 year old girl, visits the temple for refuge and to pray to Ganesh and Saraswati when she is scolded and beaten by her employer (Ganesh is the God of luck and Saraswati is the Goddess of knowledge):

*"When I pray to God I ask for a better life and for help in completing my education so that I can start up my own beauty parlour."*

A belief in God was particularly significant for the ten per cent of children who had endured more damaging abuse such as severe physical violence or sexual abuse. Their idea of hope was more closely associated with a belief in God. These children felt that God knows the truth, so sooner or later God will give them better opportunities and will punish their wrongdoers.

Hindu and Buddhist beliefs dominate Nepali culture and both incorporate the idea that God will bring justice and provide hope for everyone. Consequently, a strong cultural concept in Nepali society is 'hope until the end' (*Saas Rahesamma Aas*); a belief that you must keep on hoping, though your hopes may be shattered many times. In this sense hope is closely associated with 'striving' and contributes both to children's feelings of perseverance in their hardships and their petitions to God for justice.

### **Positive obligations to family**

Children's goals for improved social and economic conditions or 'a better life' were often inspired by the combination of a positive relationship with their family of origin and a strong sense of familial obligation. In interviews, 19 out of 47 children mentioned they have a positive relationship with their family and felt a responsibility towards their siblings and parents.

In Nepali society it is generally expected that, after the father, the eldest child of the family (especially the son) is the 'guardian' of the family. The eldest child has a responsibility to take care of the whole family and is expected to contribute to the family income, provide care, support, protect

and discipline their siblings. Although often seen as an 'obligation' of eldest children, child domestic workers saw it more positively as a responsibility that entitled them to more authority and a respected position in their family of origin. Many child domestic workers contributed to their family of origin's income either directly through the wages they earned as a domestic worker or indirectly by no longer being a financial burden on their family. Consequently many children viewed their work as an important contribution to the economic management of their family and felt proud to be fulfilling their obligation to their family through working. And although, traditionally, this obligation falls to the eldest son, girls also made use of it to negotiate a higher status in their family.<sup>18</sup>

16 year old Gita, talking about her family situation explains:

*"My family is earning money from my work which is helping them to provide for their daily needs. As the eldest child of the family I am also obliged to take care of my family; so enduring these difficulties is okay for me."*

Kiran is a 16 year old boy who started work at the age of 12. His parents recently had to take out a financial loan from a wealthy neighbour:

*"As the eldest son it's my responsibility towards my parents not to make them suffer and worry about this loan, at least I can give them a good and happy life after being employed at the government office. For this I need to study and here I am studying."*

For 11 year old Uma, her mother is the most important person in her life and she believes that she should not do anything that might hurt her. When Uma faces scolding and beating from her employer and feels like running away from the workplace, she remembers what her mother told her:

*"You are living with your aunt [employer] not with your mother, so you need to endure some difficulties."*

These examples show how children in the study, through their optimism and hope, have started to 'take charge of their destiny'. Looking more closely at the concept of hope, as 'confidence in a future that is more open, unknown and largely beyond their control' they appear to be strengthening their 'confidence' by attaching goals to the 'unknown' and by striving to achieve these goals are dismantling the idea that their future is completely 'beyond their control'.

## Rain at dawn

The 'Dawn after Dusk' concept presents an inherently optimistic picture of destiny or fate – that everything will work out in the end. However, for some children, the concept of destiny did not have such a positive outcome.

13 year old Sita has faced severe adversity and trauma in her life, she was severely beaten by her father and brother and was raped by a stranger when she ran away from her workplace. Sita was suicidal after her rape and connected her troubles to the death of her mother as well as to the concept of karma:

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<sup>18</sup> 80% of girls in the study who said they contributed to their family's income saw this contribution as a responsibility.

*“My father and brother never treated me well, they used to scold me and beat me. I left home and came to domestic work hoping for something better, but I faced it again. It seems that this is my karma [fate] and I have to bear this.”*

There were other cases of children interviewed who endured hardship and suffering because they considered it their fate or destiny. But instead of finding hope and a sense of control over their lives, they were pessimistic about changing their situation; their endurance was more akin to resignation, they had given up hope. While this kind of acceptance or resignation by children may enable them to ‘keep going’ through hardship, it also has the effect of sanctioning abusive treatment of children and promoting social acceptance of exploitative practice.

The theme of ‘dawn after dusk’ demonstrates a key coping strategy of the resilient child, that of cognitive re-framing (Spaccarelli, 1994), where children are able to change their understanding of the difficulties they face and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome. Children in this study appeared to do this in a number of ways. Firstly, children who, as domestic servants are at the bottom of the social scale, were able to reframe an unfavourable outlook for their lives into a bright future. Through goal setting they were motivated to endure their current hardships and work towards a realistic personal goal. In doing this they re-framed their employers as supporters of their goal, in particular as gate-keepers to a good education: the single most important element in achieving their goal. Children borrowed optimistic cultural concepts connected to ‘hope’ to justify this re-structuring process. Through a belief in God, children were able to displace feelings of anger and despair at their situation – God will bring justice to those who have done wrong to them. Equally because the hope God symbolises is eternal it contributes to children’s capacity to persevere; they will never give up hope. The existence of a supreme being and a supreme goal connects children’s own goals for a better position in society to the more moral quest of becoming a ‘better person’. Finally, a re-framing of a traditional cultural practice placing obligations on eldest children to be ‘providers’ for their family enabled child domestic workers to improve their social standing in their family of origin and take pride in their ability, as workers, to contribute to their family’s income. Through these means children have demonstrated an ability to take charge of their destiny, enduring hardships to reach their goals.

### **Theme Three: Positive Attitude and Self Confidence**

*“It all depends on oneself to accept and see them [problems] as challenges, we should be able to prove ourselves and find ways out of difficulties.”* Prasansa, 16 year old girl

Many children in this research displayed positive attitudes to themselves, to domestic work in general, and to the particular difficulties they faced. This positive outlook gave children confidence that they could influence or change the situations in which they found themselves.

In this context ‘attitude’ can be seen as ‘a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something’ (Oxford University, 2006), a state of mind when people look at things mentally either favourably or unfavourably (Jayasekera, 2013). And ‘positive attitude’ is a composition of positive thought, positive emotion and positive action (Buttler, 2011). In this research, ‘positive attitude’ was defined through children’s recognition of their behavioural strengths and skills, their positive views about

domestic work and being a domestic worker and their ability to explore opportunities amidst difficulties.

Ram Sharan is a 16 year old boy who was regularly scolded and slapped by his employer, and was not provided with adequate food or clothing at his workplace. Despite this exploitation, he says that during the time he was a domestic worker, he has learned how to cook well, how to operate modern gadgets and has improved his manners; he says that he feels proud of his skills in domestic work.

18 year old Sweta believes the skills she is learning as a domestic worker will help her to become a hotel manager in the future. She explains:

*"I think I can be a manager if I work in hotel. I think people become managers by first being a housekeeper and doing this work, I think I can become a hotel manager too."*

Despite the low social status of domestic work in Nepal, 15 children stated they were proud of their skills and abilities as domestic workers. These skills included cooking, knitting, sewing, handicrafts as well as skills not associated with domestic work such as dancing and art. In addition to this, children also mentioned behavioural characteristics such as not getting angry with people, 'being always happy', identifying and correcting their own mistakes (such as breaking utensils, burning food and interrupting their employer), and taking part in various programs at school and the community. This positive attitude made children more likely to take-up opportunities that came their way, in particular to make use of services provided to child domestic workers by NGOs, schools or the community (such as literacy, drama, art programs or counselling services).

This acknowledgement of their skills and strengths gave children a personal sense of worth and dignity that, in turn, built their confidence in their own abilities to tackle problems on their own. 14 children in life story interviews mentioned that they saw difficult situations as challenges, opportunities to prove their strength, their potential or to improve themselves and find solutions. For example, 19 year old Mahima summarises this theme succinctly:

*"Whenever anything happens I think it is for the best so whenever I have any problems I believe I can find a solution. I am not frustrated and I think, how can I get out of the problem? I think it's not a big problem, that's why I find my positive thinking is a strength."*

Additionally, 14 year old Prasansa, when talking about being humiliated by her employer sees her problems as challenges and goes on to advise others to be strong willed and ready to accept challenges; giving the example of herself and how she managed to go back to school despite the embarrassment she felt being older than the other pupils in her literacy class.

In another case, 15 year old Swasti talks about how she felt when her employers scolded her:

*"I think I made a mistake and I got scolded. I acknowledged my mistake and I chose to correct it."*

The connection between children's positive attitude, an acknowledgement of their skills and strengths, and an increase in self-confidence is inherent in the definition of the term 'self-

confidence' as "a feeling or consciousness of one's power or of reliance on one's circumstances." (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2013)

Yet, it must be noted that children who have positive attitudes and self-confidence are not invulnerable. In some cases their optimism may well seem misplaced. For example, the case of 14 year old Sabina, whose belief that her dancing skills will secure her a job if she gets fired is perhaps unrealistic. Sabina, who mentioned that she argued with her employer, was asked if she was intimidated by or afraid of arguing with her employer and said:

*"I can dance very well. Although I am not good at school, I am sure that I can find another job if I get fired."*

The theme of positive attitude and self-confidence is closely linked to personality factors that have been used as evidence of resiliency and stem from an internal locus of control (Morale, 2007). Children's ability to recognize their behavioural strengths and skills gave them a view of themselves (whether it was true or not) of their effectiveness and their capability to achieve a given objective. It gave them feelings of self-worth and dignity that came from within and were, often, in direct contradiction to their abusive environment, particularly astonishing given the discrimination faced by most child domestic workers. Children's desire for self improvement combined with their ability to re-frame problems as challenges gave them further optimism and confidence in their own abilities to overcome or address their problems. Furthermore it powered their agency (their ability to act) to take up opportunities such as services and support that would, in all likelihood, result in an improvement of their situation.

#### **Theme Four: Ability to Assess Risk and Develop a Protection Strategy**

*"Firstly I used to think a lot about what the person [abuser] is doing to me, I used to get angry with him and even pushed him sometimes. And he used to say 'you are staying in my house, eating my food' and he didn't allow me to do the things I wanted to do. And then I used to open the curtains, doors and windows and went outside to the terrace. If I stayed outside I got scolded by the Aunt [employer] and if I went inside to work I found the Uncle [employer/abuser] so I chose to be outside and to get scolded by the Aunt."* Mahima, 19 year old girl

Many children in this study had the ability to assess situations where they were at risk of abuse or harm and to develop strategies to protect themselves and ensure their safety. Children demonstrated a keen ability to assess and navigate the power differentials between abuser and victim, domestic worker and employer.

For this theme 'ability' is described as one's possession of means or skill to do something; and 'strategy' is the art or science of using resources and skills to execute detailed plans as effectively as possible. The study found that children had the ability to identify situations where they were at risk or vulnerable to abuse and that they subsequently explored ways to protect themselves from abuse.

In this research, 26 children from three focus group discussions and 18 children from life story interviews talked of assessing safety and developing their own protection strategies.<sup>19</sup> In the main, children talked of 'unsafe' and 'safe' places, particularly in focus groups where discussion centred on mapping the local community. In interviews children's risk assessment was more ambiguous and tended to be expressed after they had talked about their strategy to protect themselves.

Girls in focus group discussions identified a number of unsafe areas in their community and mentioned that:

*"Walking alone in the street is unsafe as the boys and men who hang around the streets tease and call out bad words to [sexually harass] us."*

Children facing sexual abuse employed common strategies to protect themselves from further abuse, in the main these strategies concentrated on being in a 'safe place', children assessed a place or situation as 'safe' if:

- They can easily be seen or heard by other people: children gave the following examples; on the terrace of their workplace, in a neighbourhood shop, on a roof top (where washing is often hung out to dry) or by opening curtains and windows of a room so that outsiders can more easily see inside;
- The potential abuser has no access to them: such as in a locked room or being in the kitchen with the female employer. Children also talked of avoiding the places where the abuser is usually found, or not opening the front door to the abuser when they are in the house on their own; and
- They are in 'safe' locations such as schools or police stations where staff have a better understanding of working children's problems and are more likely to protect children from abuse. Children also mentioned hospitals and neighbours houses as 'safe places'.

16 year old Gita has lived in violent and abusive households all her life, she talks about how the sexual abuse she suffered in her last workplace started and her strategy to protect herself:

*"The male employer used to ask me to massage him when there was no-one around. He used to look at vulgar pictures and touch me; I felt scared at that time. So, I used to avoid [working in] his room as far as possible."*

Given the severe limitations placed on child domestic workers, restricted as they are to the household for most of their time or to their local community, the strategy of avoidance was the most obvious action.

Ram Sharan is a 14 year old boy who is treated well by his employers but a man in the neighbourhood has started to show him pornographic materials and invites him to watch movies in his home. Ram Sharan feels very uncomfortable with this man but also, does not feel able to tell his employer about the situation:

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<sup>19</sup> Five boys and 21 girls participated in FGDs, eight reintegrated children, four children accessing services and six children not accessing services participated in interviews

*“When I am alone at home, I do not go on the roof top, especially on holidays. When I saw that man in the neighbourhood I tried to keep myself inside the home and work. So, for the last few months I am not talking and visiting that man.”*

Crucial to children’s assessment is the information that they gather from friends, NGOs, the employer’s family (if they are on good terms), or information they gather on their own. Children mention various strategies to avoid risk and better protect themselves. In focus group discussions a clear strategy was identified by the group: not to go out in the community unaccompanied. This prevents attack or harassment from groups of men; boys said they were concerned with being physically attacked, girls with sexual harassment or abuse. Although it is possible to put this strategy into practice for routine tasks such as fetching water from the communal tap or going to school (where children arrange set times to meet up with their friends and walk together), it is not possible for the ‘spontaneous’ errands often set by employers for child domestic workers.

Some children were able to take immediate action against sexual abuse. Uma is a 15 year girl who has worked in two households. At her previous workplace she helped in a small cafe run by her employer. She explains why she left this household so suddenly:

*“We have a common room to sleep at our workplace for all the workers and the room was left unlatched. One night when I opened my eyes I saw uncle [male employer] was at my side and moving his hand over my body. I got scared, I could not speak out. Next day I left the place without telling anyone.”*

Also 19 year old Mahima shows courage in standing up to her abuser:

*“At first he said I was like his granddaughter. Later that old man started to behave badly with me. His wife had already died. He used to come near me and touch my body. Although he stopped after I threatened to complain.”*

Although, some of the children managed to keep themselves from harm by employing these strategies, there were cases where children failed to protect themselves. In 16 interviews, children appeared to assess their situation and develop a strategy on their own. They did not share their plans with anyone because of fears that their employers might find out or because they simply had no one to discuss their strategy with; sometimes this appeared to put them at greater risk.

In one case, Sita a 13 year old girl who was severely beaten by her employer decided to run away from her workplace. However, while she was making her escape she accepted the offer of support from a man in the street who took her to a garment factory and sexually assaulted her for two days.

In another case, Rita, a 20 year old young woman who was being forced to work as a prostitute explains how she ran away from her exploitation with a friend but, once they had escaped was found by the police and arrested. Her friend’s employer had filed a case against Rita saying she had ‘trafficked’ her friend.

Despite these setbacks – as the case of Rita illustrates, many children were able to re-formulate their plans (sometimes with the help of others) and try again. Rita managed to turn her situation around with the police, explaining her case so well that they have dropped all charges against her and are supporting her to file a case against her employer.



For some children, such as Mahima, their assessment is a case of choosing the right time:

*“For anything to happen we need to wait for the proper time. In my life there were many problems for which I couldn't find the solution unless it was the right time; that's why I find time very important.”*

What is clear is that children in this study often had the tenacity to use what little resources they possessed to their best advantage.

The theme concerning children's 'ability to assess risk and develop strategy' is succinctly summed up in its title. Children in this study demonstrated resiliency in their cognitive aptitude for understanding and analysing situations of risk. Research focused particularly on children's risk to sexual abuse; a notoriously difficult area to navigate for the 'victim' due to the cognitive distortions and grooming behaviour of most sexual abusers. Child domestic workers' risk to sexual abuse is compounded by the power relations between employer and worker in a private domain. Children displayed a remarkable capacity to analyse all these factors, in some cases identifying grooming behaviour, in others submitting to the wrath of their employer in order to protect themselves from their abuser. Children's isolation and dependency on their employers resulted in what appear to be rather simple strategies; locking doors and moving onto rooftops (and may account for some of the strategies that back-fired). However, the act of strategising in itself demonstrates resilience in its attention to detail and commitment to action, however small a step this may be.

## **Theme Five: Participation in Festivals Provides an Opportunity for Reconciliation**

*“In the festival of Teej she [employer] gives me money to buy bangles when she was also buying bangles for others and I think she loves me although she scolds me a lot.”* Swasti, 15 year old girl

Children's participation in cultural festivals can be a time of opportunity for child domestic workers; a moment of respite from the daily drudge of domestic work and a time when they can make the best of their situation. It also presents an opportunity for children to reconcile their difficulties with their employers, and has the potential to be a pivotal moment in their lives. If children do not participate in festivals, however, this can be a time when child domestic workers are particularly overburdened with work and are filled with longing to see their family.

Dashain and Tihar are the most widely celebrated (Hindu) festivals in Nepal. As they take place in October and early November this time of year is seen as 'festival season' by the Nepali population and many people take time off work to visit their families. Teej is a Hindu festival that celebrates women's freedom and was mentioned a number of times by girls in interviews. During festivals in Nepal, families typically gather together at home and celebrate by preparing feasts of good food, visiting the temple as well as other families in the community. Festivals are seen as a time to have fun when people enjoy each other's company, they are a time for playing, singing, dancing and visiting family. Festivals are also considered an appropriate time for reconciliation and reunion between those who have been in conflict with each other or have been separated for some time:

*"During festivals I get to go to the funfair and play on the swings which makes me forget my problems for a while." Yuvraj, a 12 year old boy*

Children in focus group discussions talk about enjoying festivals – visiting different temples, going to parties, eating good food and some of the children are given money by their employers. Children say that their participation in cultural rituals gives them a sense of belonging to their employer's family. They feel happy during festivals and talk of having fun. For some children this sense of 'ease' and belonging helps them to feel reconciled and re-united with their employer despite past difficulties. Children also have a sense that they will be 'blessed by God' if they take part in religious ceremonies or activities as many of the festival rituals are imbued with an inherent benefit or promise; that those who participate are good people and will, by their participation alone, be blessed.

Manita is a 12 year old girl who says that she cherishes the moments of her life when she is with family and friends in her village. During difficult times she misses her family very much but she is with a less abusive employer now and says that she is able to enjoy festival time:

*"I like festivals because all the [employer's family] members have a day off and are in the house. We spend time being with each other and I enjoy it despite the workload and the problems I face."*

In interviews, 28% of children mention that they enjoy taking part in festivals because of a sense of respite they feel from their feelings of hurt. Children in focus group discussions have similar feelings of respite regarding their participation in recreational activities. These activities include playing with friends in a local playground, but also drama, singing and dancing programmes run by NGOs or school clubs. Children state that their participation helps them to feel reconciled with their situation, to accept and forgive unfair treatment by their employer even when they felt hurt by it.

When employers allow children to participate in festivals they often also provide children with gifts such as bangles and clothes or good food. Additionally, they often include their child domestic worker in the festivities, this means that they take their child domestic worker, together with the rest of the family to the shops, to markets, to temples and holy places and to visit neighbours and relatives. Being part of activities that are usually reserved for family members makes children feel that they are cared for, loved, and protected by their employing family. They report feeling able to forgive their employer's family for past mistakes and abuses such as violence, discrimination, unfair treatment or sexual harassment. Children are more able to accept the members of their employer's family as their 'new' family and see their relationship with the employing family in a more positive light.

Bhagwati, a 16 year girl who has complained of daily physical and mental abuse by her employers explains:

*"I feel happy during festivals, because during festivals, especially Dashain and Holi, my employers buy me new clothes and even allow me to participate in all the events. Even while buying clothes they let me choose the clothes I like which makes me forget my past pains and be happy."*

There is a danger, of course, that because of children's conciliatory feelings of forgiveness towards abusive employers, they believe that any abuse they are suffering will stop. This may put them in a

more vulnerable position to abuse and harm than they had been before reconciliation. However, festivals appear to be a particular 'moment' when the rules are different for some child domestic workers, this could be a turning point for those children but equally, it could just be a moment of respite.

In addition, children who are not allowed to participate in festivals by their employers feel particularly bitter and isolated. Over 14 % of children in interviews say that they do not like festival time as their workloads are increased substantially due to all the food preparation and visitors to the employer's home. And by not being allowed to visit their own family during festival season, they miss them all the more.

Suresh is 14 years old and has a heavy workload that makes her feel like crying. She is too shy and afraid to complain to her employer and so she just carries on:

*"I don't like festivals because there are many visitors and I have to work a lot which I don't like."*

Prasansa is a 14 year old girl who says she misses her family and friends back home:

*"I often recall the memory of being at home, with family and friends, having good food and going around with friends. Here I am not allowed to go outside and play with friends."*

The theme concerning children's participation in festivals appears to have the closest links to Gilligan's idea of 'turning points' (Gilligan, 2009). Gilligan argues that turning points may arise from events that may take place by chance in a person's life but it is the person's agency that is crucial in how they respond to these events and that make them a pivotal moment or turning point. Gilligan suggests that understanding these turning points is key to understanding developmental change and puts forward four conditions that need to be fulfilled: the opportunity, the readiness of the person to grasp it, the agency of the person to take active steps to respond to the opportunity, and a sustaining context which supports the change effort and adherence to the new pathway (Gilligan: 31). It is perhaps the last condition that is most problematic in connecting the theme of 'festivals' with turning points – as the research methods did not allow data collection to supply evidence of long term change in children's lives. However, exploring the links between child domestic workers' experience of festivals and Gilligan's idea of turning points highlights a particularly interesting cultural context regarding resilience that is worthy of further investigation.

Festivals in Nepal are a normative event, they are a regular feature of Nepali life that the vast majority of people participate in: they are part of the cultural narrative of Nepal. Children in this study who were allowed to participate in festivals by their employers used this opportunity to recreate the warm emotional climate of family life that many of them craved (even if this was not based on the reality of their own family). They had fun, they ate well, they were not treated as a 'worker' but a family member. And as a result, some children grasped this opportunity and changed their thinking for a moment, reconciling their difficulties with their employer or seeing their employer in a new light; as Swasti poignantly remarks 'and I think she loves me'. This micro shift in thinking is facilitated by the more macro event of the festival, which enables children who participate, at the very least, respite from the drudgery of domestic duties. At best though,

children's involvement in festivals gives them a tangible sense of belonging and can improve their social capital. During festivals, children participate in community events and interact with people in their neighbourhood, not as servants but on more equal terms (particularly for girls participating in Teej). Children in this study expressed a sense of belonging during festival time, both to their employing family, but also through their participation in festival rituals, to the social micro-system of community. Festivals' inherent promise, that all who participate will be blessed, is a collective narrative that inspires hope and motivates children to reach for their goals. Festivals present an opportunity for children to change their lives. But is this change sustainable or are festivals simply a short respite from a life of drudgery? Can festivals be a turning point for children whose lives are characterised by isolation, a pivotal moment when they can re-frame their experience as a domestic worker and build their support in the community?

## 8. Conclusion

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In this chapter three conclusions are presented, the first is that the five themes are interlinked, with many of the same resilience factors highlighted in each theme. Evidence of the connections between themes is outlined through analysis of the key resilience factors – personality factors, cognitive factors and societal factors as evidenced from the data. Three case studies are presented, from the stories of Samjhana, Mahima and Rita to illustrate the interdependence of resilience in this study. The second conclusion revolves around a key characteristic of child domestic work – that of isolation – and how child domestic workers find support given their isolated position in society. Findings suggest that children seek support externally despite the limited number of people they are in touch with and internally through their own resourcefulness. The third conclusion is that resilience factors have a cause and effect relationship with each other, the existence of one resilience factor causing other factors to develop. A flow chart, outlining the cause and effect relationships between themes helps illustrate this point.

### Interlinking of Resilience Factors

One of the conclusions we can draw from this study is that the five themes identified are interlinked as evidenced by the fact that many of the same resilience factors were present in a number of themes. Key personality, cognitive and societal factors that have a strong correlation with resilience were identified in two or more themes as outlined below.

#### Personality factors

Theme two ‘dawn after dusk: hope enables children to endure hardship’ focused particularly strongly on personality factors. It highlighted children’s self esteem, in the form of their ability to recognise behavioural strengths and skills (for example in domestic work) combined with ‘personal effectiveness’ – where children’s recognition of their skills gave rise to a sense of worth and dignity which, in turn built their confidence in their abilities to tackle problems on their own. In essence, theme two seemed to showcase what Bandura calls ‘self-efficacious’ personality factors – children who have a positive perception of their competence to perform certain tasks (Bandura in Turner et al. 1993). They are children who have self confidence but also a sense of coherence – in that they connect their internal and external worlds. This was also particularly evident in theme three ‘positive attitude and self-confidence’ where children set themselves realistic goals that were often based on their own skills (as illustrated by Sweta, who wanted to become a hotel manager based on her skills in domestic work). Their internal hopes (of a better life) were transformed into external and concrete goals (of a better job). This self-efficacy comes from the children’s sense of direction or mission in the goals that they have set for themselves. Furthermore, children displayed a degree of empathy as some of these goals, to be social workers or teachers, were so they could ‘help people like me’. Consequently theme two and three displayed connections between personality factors that have strong correlations with resilience.

The personality factor of ‘extraversion’ was most evident in theme one ‘someone to confide in’ and in theme five ‘participation in festivals enables reconciliation’ but was also relevant to theme two ‘dawn after dusk’. Extraversion, meaning ‘the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of

others' (Morale, 2007) is likely to be a strong personality factor behind children's desire to find a confidante in theme one and can also be linked to their enjoyment of festivals and recreational activities where they are mixing with groups of people in theme five. Extraversion is connected to cognitive resilience factors where children seek the emotional support of others. This reinforces the reason behind children's desire to meet others – they are looking for support from others. It also connects to theme two 'dawn after dusk' where resilient children are more likely (through their own agency) to take-up opportunities or support services. Furthermore, theme two highlights the connection between extraversion and self-efficacy as children who are more confident about their skills and have an associated goal are more motivated to take-up opportunities or support services that will help them achieve their goal.

Extraversion and self-efficacy appear to be personality factors that resilient children make use of to counter the isolation that child domestic workers commonly face.

Children who displayed positive attitudes and self confidence (theme three) and an ability to assess and develop strategies (theme four) were drawing alternately on internal and external control mechanisms. The children who displayed behaviours and attitudes consistent with theme three drew on internal control mechanisms to motivate themselves to achieve their goals (by recognising their skills, they were better able to see themselves achieving their goals). However, the children who displayed behaviours and attitudes consistent with theme four, which predominantly focused on the development of self-protection strategies on sexual abuse, saw their abusers as in control and to blame for their abuse; they were trying to find ways around this external power differential. And even when their plans were scuppered, as in the case of Rita who failed to escape from sexual exploitation, they re-formulated their plans and tried again. It is interesting to note that in theme one (someone to confide in) children were conscious, fearful even, that others might blame themselves for their abuse (when searching for a trustworthy confidante) but they did not blame themselves. In theme two, 'dawn after dusk' children who were facing more damaging abuse such as severe physical violence or sexual abuse, laid the blame for their abuse firmly with their abuser. These children, whose idea of hope was more closely associated with a belief in God, believed that as God knows the truth, He will punish their wrong-doers.

It is interesting to explore the personality factor of 'agreeableness' given the particular context of 'servitude' and the South Asian culture within which this study is based. The concept of childhood in Nepal is based on expectations that children are dependent on others for help and consequently autonomy and self-reliance in children is discouraged. In addition, the concept of 'servitude' and the expectation that domestic workers are subservient to their masters means that there are very strong cultural norms placing expectations on child domestic workers to be obedient, non-confrontational and subservient. Agreeableness is defined as 'the tendency to favour compassion and co-operation above suspicion and antagonism in one's relations with others' (Morale 2007) and has been seen as a personality factor that has a non-significant correlation with resilience (Campbell-Sills, Cohan *et al.* 2006: 7 in Morale 2007). However, 'agreeableness' appears to be present in the concept of 'reconciliation' in theme five (on festivals) in the form of children's 'acceptance' of their situation as a domestic worker and, in the tendency of children to forgive their employers for past mistakes. In Asian cultures 'agreeableness' appears to have a close correlation with the notion of 'saving face' – a key cultural concept connecting subservient behaviours such as patience and compromise to the social standing, dignity and honour of relations with others. Consequently it may be that, by children

displaying a degree of 'agreeableness' in particular in their relations with their employing family, they are recognising the importance of 'saving face' in the Asian context; but their 'agreeable' behaviour does not necessarily reflect their thinking or even any subsequent action against their employer.

### Cognitive factors

The cognitive factor associated with resilience that resonated in almost all themes was 'cognitive re-framing' whereby children changed their understanding of 'a traumatic event and its implications' (Morale 2007) which can be translated, in this study, as a change in their understanding of their present adversities as child domestic workers.

In theme two 'dawn after dusk: hope enables children to endure hardship', cognitive re-framing appeared to take place in three ways. Firstly, through realistic goal setting, children re-framed an unfavourable outlook for their lives. Secondly, children re-framed their employers from inhibitors of their goals to supporters of their goals. Employers became 'gatekeepers' to a good education, which for most children, was the most important step to achieve their goal. Thirdly, children re-framed traditional cultural practices that place obligations on eldest children as 'guardians' of their family into a pride in their ability to contribute to their origin family's income (the income from their domestic work) resulting in an improved social standing in the origin family. In theme three 'positive attitudes and self confidence,' many children re-framed their difficulties as challenges or opportunities to prove their strength, their potential or to improve themselves. And in theme five, children's participation in festivals gave them two opportunities to start reframing their lives as domestic workers. Firstly, by being treated as a family member not a worker during festival time they could imagine themselves as something other than a domestic worker. Secondly, the feeling of belonging that was engendered during festival season, both to their employing family and their local community allowed them to transpose their concept of family and community from their family of origin to their employing family. In all these themes children provided evidence of their ability to detach themselves from their current suffering, set aside their feelings of pain, anger and sorrow at the hardships they faced in order to re-tell their stories as narratives that had a stronger vein of hope running through them. In theme one, children's help-seeking behaviour in sharing their problems with a confidante would, in all likelihood, require them to tell a coherent and meaningful account of their life. In re-framing their hardships children proved, in many different contexts, their ability to attach a new meaning and purpose to their life and tell a coherent story based on that meaning.

Implicit to theme one, 'someone to confide in', is a cognitive factor that has long been associated with resilience: seeking emotional support and disclosure towards a third person. However this resilience factor is dependent on another, that of children's ability to analyse and understand (aptitude), as children need first to assess the quality of emotional support that a third person or confidante may provide. Aptitude is also present in theme four where children demonstrated particularly strong assessment and analysis skills in their appraisal of the risks associated with protecting themselves from sexual abuse. They were able to overcome or see through the cognitive distortions of their abusers' grooming behaviours and identify their risk to further, and in all likelihood, more severe abuse. They were also able to negotiate the structural barriers, in the form of the power imbalance between themselves and their abusers (who were either their employer or were connected to their employing family) as in the case of 19 year old Mahima who submitted to

the wrath of her female employer in order to protect herself from her female employer's husband. Children's aptitude in these themes was based on a realistic appraisal of their situation. Children did not avoid or consciously deny what was really going on – a way of coping that has little connection to resilience. Instead, they were able to detach themselves from their experiences and soberly assess the extent of their risks. Even children's dreams in theme two (dawn after dusk) were, for the large part, based in reality and relatively humble; to become a teacher, a social worker, a policeman. Many children in this study displayed an ability to be grounded, they did not harbour illusions about their position in life as a domestic worker and yet they did have hope, as Vanistendael (1995) succinctly remarks "realism without hope becomes cynicism, and hope without realism become illusion."

Children demonstrated a remarkable optimism given the adversities they were facing as domestic workers and the likelihood that they would stay in domestic service (particularly girls) for the rest of their working lives. A positive outlook and the existence of hope in many of the themes seems to reflect a dispositional optimism in many of the children in this study; the idea that positive things will happen to them at some point in their future. In theme three, there is a palpable optimism 'borrowed' from the cultural traditions of '*Dukha Pachhi Sukha Aaucha*' meaning there is always light after dark and '*Saas Rahesamma Aas*', a belief that hope springs eternal. In theme five focusing on festivals, children displayed a similar situational optimism from their participation in cultural rituals that, in most cultures, are imbued with an inherent benefit or promise – those who participate will be blessed. Optimism, as displayed in a number of themes, is said to be one of the most important cognitive factors in moderating the effect of stress (Tusaie and Patterson in Morale 2007).

### Societal factors

Although, perhaps the most significant societal factor for children is their family, child domestic workers' separation from family and the focus of this study on the employing family, meant that the influence of children's origin family on their present adversities was more difficult to identify than other societal factors. However, it was clear from theme two, dawn after dusk, that it was only if children had a positive relationship with their origin family that they were able to take pride in their work as a domestic worker and see it as contributing to the family income and wellbeing. Furthermore, in the same theme, children's positive relationship with family members was evident in their motivation to endure difficulties for their parents' sake as well as own. Additionally, in theme five, children's sense of 'belonging' to their employer's family during festival times enabled them to borrow and adapt the concept of a supportive and loving family even if, in reality, they had not experienced this in their own lives. Finally, a parent substitute is evident in children's search for a confidante (theme one) as someone whom they share a warm and supportive relationship with and who can help offset the negative effects of abuse (Turner et al. 1993).

A child's neighbourhood and community are membership groups where they can find support that allows them to develop resilience in the face of adversity. The most obvious theme that links to community resilience is that on children's participation in festivals where child domestic workers' daily life is connected to a macro-level event that Nepali society shares. During festival season children felt they belong to their neighbouring community and, by participating in festival rituals, would be blessed by adhering to their community's moral rules. Festivals also provided children with



an opportunity to improve their social capital in the community and develop a network of support outside the employing family.

Cultural and community factors played an important role for children in this study in creating an environment marked by care, co-operation and involvement, and contributing to the development of resilience. In theme two, 'dawn after dusk' children's belief in the strategy of hoping until the end, '*Saas Rahesamma Aas*', gave them the impetus to strive and realise this hope, to see their adversities as temporary and be optimistic about their future. However, it is perhaps the collective experience of cultural and community factors on children that links these themes together. Children's participation in their community – either physically as in the case of festivals, or mentally as in their belief in hope, enables them to feel they belong to and are valued by their community and increases their self-confidence. Children felt part of a collective narrative, an experience that is, perhaps, more important in Asian cultures than elsewhere.

As a societal factor friends were, of course, very important to the children in this study. Most strikingly, with the first theme 'someone to confide in', where children were more likely to confide in a friend than anyone else. Children in focus groups described friends as peers who understood what they were feeling and could teach them things they do not know or help them to solve problems. In validating research findings, child domestic workers identified theme one as the most important to them because of its focus on friends as suitable people to share their problems with and receive emotional support from. Furthermore, the concept of 'confidante' made an appearance in a number of other themes – in theme four when children were making risk assessments they gathered information for this assessment from friends and their strategies for protection were often discussed with friends. And in theme two, 'dawn after dusk' children refined their goals in discussion with friends.

Spirituality and belief were closely connected to cultural and community resilience factors. This was most apparent in theme two, 'dawn after dusk' where children prayed for help with the anger they felt towards their employers. Seeking God's support to rid oneself of negative emotions has been shown to correlate with a reduction in depressive moods (Gail 2006: 19 in Morale, 2007). Children also prayed for a better situation (to achieve their goals) and tied to this was the idea that they would become a better person. This allowed children a feeling of connection to a superior being or to the existence of a supreme goal (Jaramillo-Vélez, Ospina-Muñoz *et al.* 2005). So, too, did their involvement in religious practices as part of festivals, which provided a sense of respite from their daily chores as well as a connection to a higher purpose and a sense of blessing from serving God rather than their employer.

Cultural and religious festivals, in theme five, appeared to show some of the characteristics of Gilligan's concept of 'turning points' (2009). However, it is recognised that a number of other resilient factors needed to be present for festivals to be considered as a possible turning point. For children to respond to the opportunities that festivals presented (of increasing social capital by developing a support network, or of finding a confidante from that network of support), children needed to take active steps to grasp these opportunities: they needed agency. The development of children's agency in this study was evidenced in personality factors correlating with resilience such as their ability to recognise their strengths and to tackle problems on their own: self-efficacy (a term which in itself combines two personality factors attributed to resilience – self esteem and personal

effectiveness). Agency is also demonstrated in theme two through children's development of realistic goals (an element of self-efficacy) combined with an extravert nature (another personality trait associated with resilience). Children in this study who were confident about their skills and had an associated goal were more motivated to take-up opportunities or support services that would help them achieve their goal. Thus, if children already displayed the personality factors associated with resilience of self-efficacy and extrovertism, and they acted on cognitive resilience factors where they sought the emotional support of and disclosure to with a third person, they would be more likely to take up the opportunities presented during festivals. However, the data did not show an example of festivals acting as a turning point. A longer time-frame for the study may have produced these results. Nevertheless, it is an area worth exploring in further research, particularly in the context of Hindu-based cultures, where festivals are a regular 'macro-level' occurrence.

## Case Studies

The following case studies highlight the interdependence of resilience factors demonstrated by children in this study and, in some cases, the evolving or changing nature of resilience.

### Samjhana

Samjhana's case demonstrates a 10 year story of endurance and tenacity. At a young age Samjhana suffered the double blow of being sexually abused by her employer then being betrayed by her 'confidante'. However, when faced with abuse for the second time and with very limited resources, she demonstrates a tenacity in her ability to pick herself up and gain emotional support from elsewhere. Although Samjhana's story clearly demonstrates cognitive resilience factors in her help-seeking behavior to find a 'confidante' she also displays an amazing capacity to endure. Samjhana changes employer five times – she is pushed into domestic service by poverty but, despite the hardships she faces in her employment, continues to hope for better and is able to get herself out of particularly abusive situations. Her endurance appears to be based on her strong attachment to a very clear but realistic goal and this goal is quietly fuelled by a sense of hope (of a better life) that she shares with her father. Samjhana's sense of direction comes from her self-efficacy, a belief in her skills as a domestic worker and as a carer, and her qualities of sincerity and commitment. In Samjhana's story her resilience develops over time. From an initial yearning for emotional support to escape severe adversity, she starts to recognise the skills and characteristics she has that enable her to set a clear goal for a better life. Motivated by this goal she feels able to cope with her current difficulties (she is currently still working as a domestic worker) and is progressing towards a better future.

Samjhana is a 17 year old girl who has only recently come into contact with CWISH. This happened through a local shopkeeper who told her about a programme she now attends for child domestic workers at a local outreach centre where she is gaining literacy and life skills and is learning about children's rights. Samjhana explains that she was sent to Kathmandu by her mother 10 years ago to live with her father. As a casual labourer, her father did not earn enough to look after her so he sent her to work in domestic service thinking this would provide her with a better life. Since the age of seven she has worked in five different houses.

Samjhana recalls her experience in the first house:

*“There was an old woman in the house who was very weak and I had to look after her, mainly I had to massage her with oil every day.”*

Samjhana, did not like the female employer in the house who was rude and demanding. As well as caring for the elderly lady, Samjhana who was still only seven years old, was also expected to undertake domestic chores. She recalls:

*“I was too small and I sometimes spilled water while scrubbing the floor and broke the glasses while washing. For these mistakes I was beaten severely, the aunt (employer) pulled my hair and dragged me. I thought it was so difficult to live this way, and told my father.”*

She did not, however, appear to tell her father of the sexual harassment she suffered at her first workplace – at the hands of her male employer who touched and fondled her. She says that when she confided in the daughter of her employer, expecting advice and support from her, she was not believed and was instead scolded and told to keep quiet.

Samjhana was then brought to Sorakhutte and the house of a Sherpa man: in this house she faced sexual abuse for the second time:

*“I felt scared in that house. The man [employer] used to come to my room every night and ask me to undress myself. He used to pull off my blankets and touch me. He even used to show me vulgar movies and tell me that we should try to imitate them. He used to tell me to take off my clothes and he would try to come into my room. And when I refused to undress myself he once locked me in the room for two days. And I banged the door and asked him to let me out but he didn’t.”*

On hearing Samjhana’s banging a neighbouring tenant in the building asked her what was happening and she felt able to confide in him:

*“I felt scared and ran away from him [her abuser], kept myself inside my room and locked it, there I cried. I also shared this with the tenants living at that place and they suggested that when he does it again, I should tell them and they will call the police.”*

When her father came to visit her next, the tenant took him aside and told him how she was being treated. Samjhana remembers that the tenant scolded her father, saying that her father didn’t care for his daughter. Her father found her another place to work and, although Samjhana doesn’t talk much about her feelings for her father in her interview, she says when he took her away from this place she was happy.

Looking back, Samjhana says she has had difficulties but she always found a way out so she has learned to manage things, she believes this ability will help her achieve her dream of being independent. Samjhana is proud of her skills in managing a heavy workload, of her caring attitude and sincerity and her ability to work responsibly, despite the hardships:

*"I want to be an independent woman in the future. I don't know how, but I can manage work very well and someone who works well and works with sincerity will get a job anywhere."*

Samjhana stayed in her next house just six months, leaving after heeding a warning of violence and abuse. When asked why she left, she explains:

*"The uncle and aunt [employers] fought regularly. One night at midnight aunt left the house and went to her parent's home. And the next day she called me and told me to leave too. She warned me that her husband beats her always and he would do the same to me. So, I was scared and I called my father and I left that house."*

Despite all these hardships, Samjhana talks of a clear goal she has set herself and how it motivates her to cope with a heavy workload (so she can continue earning) and helps her get through her problems:

*"I need to continue to work and save my salary so that I can open a tailor shop in the future. Therefore, enduring some difficulties is not a big problem."*

After a few weeks at her father's house Samjhana was taken by her father to work for a family known to him. Samjhana says this was the best place that she has worked and was the first time she started attending school:

*"I was given time to study in this workplace. I didn't have to do much work. The aunt and sister in the house were nice to me. Later the uncle of the house became a cancer patient. The grandmother of the house was very old and one day she fell and broke her spine. I then had to spend a lot of time caring for her, I even had to help her to go to the toilet and clean her down afterwards. I had to wash a lot of clothes. It was so difficult for me. One day while I was on the terrace I fainted and the doctor told me it was because of weakness. So, though I stayed for nine years in this house, I had to leave due to my health."*

Currently Samjhana is working for a family in Koteswor, where she undertakes domestic chores and also looks after a baby. She explains:

*"I am staying in this house with the hope that they will help me get onto a sewing course. I have been changing houses and facing all these difficulties with the hope that one day I would learn sewing and open my own tailor shop. So if the employers don't allow me to learn sewing I will probably have to change this house as well."*

## **Mahima**

Mahima's story demonstrates, in particular, the structural barriers that exist for all children coping with sexual abuse – the power imbalance between victim and perpetrator that is compounded by being a girl, a child and a domestic servant. Mahima demonstrates acute consciousness of these factors, but nevertheless shows courage in her ability to negotiate them. She would rather face the wrath of her female employer than be abused by her male employer (and husband of female employer), and she patiently waits for the right moment to confide in a trustworthy person who will not stigmatize her. Mahima demonstrates many cognitive factors of resilience, not least her aptitude

for assessment and analysis. During three long years she is abused she tries numerous avoidance tactics and protection strategies, some of these fail and her resilience appears to wane when her teachers are unsupportive and misunderstand her inability to study. However, she learns from her mistakes, she endures her hardships, protecting her mother from the truth and at the same time drawing strength from their close relationship. But it is her faith in God, her belief in her own abilities to overcome her problems and, underneath it all, her drive to better the situation for herself and her family that motivate her to keep on going. And when she judges that the time is right she takes action and speaks out and, just one year on, is able to look back on her story and learn from it.

Mahima is a 19 year girl who, one year ago, was rescued from domestic service by CWISH. She has been reintegrated with her family and is now studying in secondary school. Mahima says she hopes to be an accountant one day and dreams of being rich and building a house for her parents in Kathmandu. She feels proud of her personal strengths:

*"My strengths are that I am vocal, I protest against wrong actions. I protested when my parents enrolled my brother in a private English school but enrolled me in a government school. Before I act, however, I do look at the 'pros and cons'. People say I am a courageous girl."*

Mahima was 12 years old when she decided, against her mother's wishes, to move to Kathmandu. At home, she says she had a happy life with her family, was an active student in her school and was a member of a school child club. But she was very attracted to city life and believed she would get better educational opportunities in Kathmandu than in her village, so she was happy to go into domestic work.

In Kathmandu she worked in two different houses. In the first, where she stayed for a year, she was beaten and made to work long hours. In the second, where she worked for six years, she was sexually abused.

In her first house she had a heavy workload. She says that the aunt of the house treated her like a machine and gave her many chores. Alongside her heavy workload she says she was beaten and scolded for no reason, which made her feel angry but still she could do nothing:

*"My aunt (employer) thought I was a machine and can do everything. She wanted to show off to everyone that she could afford to keep a domestic worker in her home. So, all the time she would call me to the gate to carry her things. She beat me when I made small mistakes."*

In her first workplace, it was her lack of opportunities to study that prompted her to change employers. She recalls:

*"I was here (in Kathmandu) to study and to get better opportunities but I could not bear the daily scolding, slapping and too much work. One day the man (her recruiter) came to my workplace and I asked him to help me change my employers. So I moved to the next place; but that was hell."*

In her second workplace, the grandfather and the father from her employing family sexually abused her and threatened to kick her out of the house if she resisted or told anyone:

*"At first he said I was like his granddaughter. Later that old man started to behave badly towards me. His wife had already died. He used to come near me and touch my body. Although he stopped after I threatened to complain, he used to talk to me differently."*

The abuse lasted for three years, in this time Mahima reacted in a number of ways:

*"Initially I was confused about what he was doing, later on I realised he was doing all bad things and when I asked him to stop he said 'who are you to stop me in my home'. I was scared of telling this to anyone as it might be my own fault and also my schooling may stop because I may have to leave the house."*

Mahima says she used to get angry when she was being sexually abused but she felt helpless. She used to cry and would avoid being alone with her abusers. She would go to places like the rooftop where people could see her more easily and sometimes she threatened her abusers:

*"I started cleaning his room with the curtains, door, and windows open. I also stayed on the terrace (where people can see me). Sometimes, Auntie [her employer] used to scold me for staying outside and not doing any work. But I preferred the scolding rather than run the risk of being abused by him."*

Once she complained to the female employer (the wife and daughter of her two abusers) who advised Mahima to hit back and shout at the two men when they tried abusing her again:

*"I was so much afraid and felt helpless, I cried a lot. Often I went to the toilet and cried. I felt bad and guilty for not taking the advice of my mother who said I should not come to Kathmandu. When my mother called me I used to lie to her and say that everything is fine. But I was weeping in my heart."*

She told herself that she was living in someone else's home so she had to endure many different types of hardship. Sometimes she felt positive about her situation:

*"I think there is a (good) reason for whatever happens. So whenever I have any problems, I believe I can find a solution. I am not frustrated and I will find a way because there are always solutions to problems. That's why I find my positive thinking is a strength."*

But sometimes she had difficulty coping. She was worried that she would be stigmatised if she told anyone about her abuse. Sometimes Mahima did not receive the support or understanding she was expecting. She complained that her schoolteachers did not understand her problems, and says there were teachers who beat her for not completing her homework. They were not aware that she had a very heavy workload (so could not complete her homework in time) and did not know that she was suffering from severe stress (due to sexual abuse), so was unable to put her mind to her studies.

Mahima explains how her faith in God helped her to overcome her problems:

*"I feel relieved when praying to God. I had only one support at that time. It was God. I know God helps many people and me as well. So I kept praying I would get out of this hell. And finally CWISH came."*

Eventually, Mahima confided in a counsellor based in her school:

*"I was very much confused shall I tell my problem to her [counsellor] or not? When Miss A [counsellor] told us that people who want to talk about private issues such as menstruation can talk with her separately, I decided to talk to her. Talking with her built my hopes that I would be free soon. If she had talked about 'sexual abuse' to us I would never have met up with her, because I felt it would bring shame to me and would worry my mother and family."*

Now that she is reintegrated with her family and attending secondary school she is able to reflect on her experience as a domestic worker, looking back Mahima recognises the importance of timing:

*"For anything to happen we need to wait for the proper time. In my life there were many problems for which I couldn't find the solution unless it was the right time; that's why I find time very important."*

## Rita

Rita's story shows how, with the support of a number of people, she was able to escape a very exploitative environment and start to rebuild her life. Rita's help-seeking behavior enabled her to identify a friend who was also experiencing abuse and wanted to join her in a bid to escape exploitation. Rita also reached out to a married couple who gave her practical help (buying tickets for the escape plan) and she made use of her sister's house to escape to. The differing roles and relationships involved in her complex escape plan must have required careful negotiation and assessment of risk and a fair degree of extravertism. Rita is strongly convinced of the wrong-doing against her and is encouraged by the police (that mistakenly arrest her) to bring a case against her employer. Again, Rita's skills in negotiation and communication must have helped the police to make a complete u-turn in their thinking about her victimhood. Rita has a grounded, courageous and responsible approach to her life – after suffering abuse in silence for five years she now wants to tell her family about her exploitation and is even prepared to discuss her HIV status with them. Rita is a young woman who demonstrates a realistic appraisal of her situation, she does not avoid or consciously deny a possible negative outcome (that she might be HIV positive). She has enough confidence in her relationship with her mother to hope and expect that her mother will support her treatment for HIV Aids should her fears be realised, and she already has plans for her long-term future.

Rita, is now 20 years old and is living in a shelter for exploited young women but is very soon planning to return home. In her village Rita had dropped out of school and was working alongside her mother as a casual agricultural labourer. They both moved to a slum area, hoping they would get land from the government. Rita remembers:

*"Our second home was in a slum area as we had heard that those living in slums would get land from the Government. But then I had to cook at our house and do domestic chores [at her home] so I left school."*

She left her home in the slum without telling her mother as she was afraid she would disapprove and was brought to Kathmandu by one of her relatives with the promise of a good job. She came to Kathmandu at the age of 14 and worked for five years as a domestic worker but was also sexually

exploited by her employer. She said her employer used to take money from men and would leave her with them for hours:

*"I had to work as a prostitute. If I didn't agree, my employer used to scold and beat me. So I agreed. It continued for a year. I wanted them to stop it but I never got the courage as they used to beat me."*

She was taken to different places by her employer to be sexually exploited, although she did not receive any money. Whenever she resisted, they would beat her and this made her scared. For the last year she worked as a cleaner at an office and her employer, again, took all her salary. Rita says she kept silent for five years of suffering and that she was too scared to fight against the torture she was experiencing – she did whatever her employers asked her to do – working as a sex worker and a domestic worker. Despite this very difficult existence Rita had some good friends, Radha, another domestic worker, and a neighbouring couple, Lalita and her husband, who were a huge support:

*"I had a friend in the same area (Radha) who was also a domestic worker. I used to share my problems with her. She too had to face beatings and torture from her employer. So we decided to run away and planned it together. Then, one day, we ran and we were helped by another friend [Lalita] and her husband who helped us get our tickets and we ran."*

Rita explained that she and Radha ran to her sister's house where they stayed for four or five days. But they were arrested by the police before they could go any further:

*"The police said Radha's employer had filed a case against me saying I brought Radha to sell her and I was charged with human trafficking! But later Radha and I spoke to the police and explained that we both planned to run away together. And so, the police freed us."*

It was the police who supported Radha and Rita and brought them to Shakti Suamuha (a shelter for sexually exploited children) where Rita still lives. Rita is now planning to file a case against her former employer, again, supported and encouraged by the police who first arrested her and heard her story. She is going back home very soon and is hopeful that her family will support her in taking legal action:

*"I want to meet my mother and tell all the truth. I am sure she will understand me and will support me to file a case against that employer who abused me for five years."*

However she still has something she is unable to share with those close to her as she is afraid she may have contracted HIV Aids. She explains:

*"During the festival time I suffered from fever and diarrhea. I felt like I had a urine infection but I didn't share it with anyone because I suspect I am suffering from HIV so I don't want to share it with anyone."*



Although Rita has already had a 'negative' test result for HIV she is still concerned as she has heard that it takes time for the disease to be detected. Despite this, she is planning to share her concerns with her family and is hoping they will support her treatment if she is found to be infected.

This is her first step in a new future, in the long-term she is planning to receive training so that she can, one day, own a shop and earn a for living for herself.

## **Finding Support from a Position of Isolation**

One issue cutting across all themes was children's use of support networks. Although this is highlighted, in part, in relation to societal factors affecting resilience (in the section above) it is worth exploring in more detail due to the context of child domestic workers as isolated and dependent on their employers.

Findings from this study support the picture of child domestic workers' lives as characterised by isolation. In the main, domestic work was undertaken by children on their own, children were regularly locked in the house when employers went out, had limited mobility in the community and were made more vulnerable to sexual abuse by their isolation. They are considered a hard-to-reach group for those wanting to provide services to them.

This isolation was reflected in the five themes with the dominance of resilience factors that were, in the main, associated with the 'self'; the inner world of child domestic workers where they have more freedom than their outer world of servitude in the home. This was achieved through cognitive factors associated with resilience. In particular, cognitive re-framing, which was identified in almost all themes and enabled children to re-frame some of the people around them to appear actively 'supportive' when, in reality, they were just an impassive resource. Additionally, through personality factors associated with resilience, notably the ability to be self-efficacious which enabled children, through the development of self-confidence, to connect their internal world to the external.

When looking at external sources of support for children, theme one: 'someone to confide in' had the most obvious connections to support. It also highlighted children's priorities regarding the kind of support they were looking for when facing sexual abuse. Children differentiated 'confidante' from the more general idea of a 'supportive person' in relation to their need for someone who will not panic or become stressed easily. This was particularly pertinent for children sharing problems of sexual abuse, and for some children, ruled out their parents as confidantes as they did not want to add to their parents' burdens. In assessing a suitable a 'confidante' children were looking for someone they could trust who would not break confidentiality, but also someone who would stand up for them. There was an expectation that their 'confidante' would be able to help them resolve their problems (possibly take action on their behalf) rather than just listen.

Children looked for different kinds of support from their confidantes depending on whether sexual abuse had taken place or not. Children were most likely to confide in their friends when they were afraid that sexual abuse might take place so turned to other child domestic workers for sympathy and confirmation of their fears. However, they were more likely to confide in adults when sexual abuse had already taken place and action needed to be taken involving the authorities.

In theme two: dawn after dusk children's ability to set and work towards personal goals formed the basis of their hopes for a better future. Children re-framed the people around them to be supportive of this positive future; and did this by using those they met on a regular basis, teachers, social workers, drivers or restaurant owners for inspiration as role models. These people didn't necessarily have to physically support children or advise them but children used their example to set their goals. Children's cognitive re-framing was most powerful, however, when it related to employers. Even when employers were only providing basic working conditions (adequate food, shelter, payment and fair treatment) some children re-framed their employers as supportive – believing that if employers gave child domestic workers the opportunity to study they were supporting them to realise their goals.

Because study was such an important way for children to achieve their goals, schooling and teachers were a key support for children. However, teachers played a dual role. Not only were teachers helping children to achieve their goal by facilitating their study and learning – they were also often in a position to refer them to appropriate services. Many children who talked about the support they received from school were actually talking about an NGO run literacy programme rather than a state run school. For example, children talked about learning life skills, how to protect themselves and children's rights at school. These classes had either taken place in a 'child club' from a state run school or were part of the curriculum for a literacy programme – both initiatives that are run by NGOs rather than the government. Consequently the connection between school and children's access to services was strong; with teachers acting as key gatekeepers.

Theme two 'dawn after dusk' highlighted how children made use of Hinduism to give them support. Their prayers to particular Gods for help with their hardships enabled children to displace feelings of anger and despair at their situation and to endure hardship for the time being – justice would prevail in the future to those who were abusing them. The Hindu system of multiple Gods for different issues who have humanlike characteristics allowed children to compartmentalise the support they required. For example, children mentioned praying in particular to Saraswati the God of Knowledge for support with their studies. The respite the temple offered to children gave them a physical space to feel supported and blessed (for some children this space was available in their employer's home – in the form of a prayer room).

Conversely child domestic worker's ability to support others – in particular their parents and family of origin – also played a part in their resilience. Children took pride in their ability, as a worker, to contribute to their family's income.

Theme three highlighted resilience factors that enabled children to have a positive attitude and develop self-confidence. Given many child domestic workers' lack of contact with the world outside their employing family it is not surprising that they relied on themselves for support. Acknowledgement of their skills and strengths gave children a personal sense of worth and dignity that, in turn, built their confidence in their abilities to tackle problems on their own and gave them the agency to seek the support of others when self-help was not enough.

In theme four where resilience was found in children's ability to assess risk and strategise, children gleaned information from their support network (of friends, NGO personnel, teachers or their employing family) to help them assess risk and develop a strategy. Without necessarily knowing the child's whole story (as in the case of a 'confidante') people in children's lives were supportive

because they possessed information of the world outside the employing family. This was particularly important in enabling children to access appropriate services and was the reason why teachers were often cited by children as important people in their lives. Additionally children in focus groups mentioned local shopkeepers. In one focus group discussion children all mentioned one shopkeeper in the community who had been helpful and kind, in another discussion children talked about a shopkeeper who had given them credit, and in an interview one child (Samjhana) mentioned that a shopkeeper had actually referred her to the literacy class she was currently attending.

In addition, children acknowledged that the company of others could be used to protect themselves from abuse. In routine tasks such as fetching water from the communal tap, children arranged set times to meet up with friends and walk together. Furthermore there were many cases of children using the company of others as a protective mechanism, without these people's knowledge. To avoid an abuser children moved to a room where others were present, they went onto the rooftop where neighbours could see or hear them or went to the market with their female employer. In these cases, support was given unwittingly by the people around children, in the form of their physical presence.

In theme five children's participation in festivals enabled them to feel supported by the community. Children connected this support to a sense of belonging both to their employing family and to the local community. Child domestic workers' participation in festivals demonstrated to the community and to themselves that they had a role in the community other than that of domestic servant. On a practical level, children increased their social capital by getting to meet and know more people in the community and developing a wider support network.

## **The Cause and Effect Relationship between Resilience Factors**

Another conclusion drawn from this study is that resilience factors have a cause and effect relationship with each other. In the development of themes it was clear that a number of children's stories were relevant to three or more themes. Additionally, in 39 of 47 interviews children displayed multiple resilience factors and it was found that the existence of one resilience factor caused other factors to develop.

The flow chart below outlines the connections between the resilience factors found in each theme. The theme of 'someone to confide in' or 'confidante' can be used to illustrate the cause and effect relationship between resilience factors found in this study. For example, it was found that having a 'confidante' generates hope for a child because it enables a child to better assess their situation and develop a stronger strategy (through discussing their situation with someone they trust). Similarly, the innate 'optimism' – sometimes expressed as 'hope' by children, motivates children to continue to look and eventually find a suitable confidante, this optimism also enables them to identify positive opportunities at their workplace (re-framing what could be seen as negative aspects of their workplace into positive). This interaction and planning with another person develops a positive attitude in the child and gives them confidence in their abilities to overcome their problems as well as pushing them into developing a strategy to attain their goals. At the same time, a child's positive attitude and self-confidence in their ability to judge characters and situations enables them to find a confidante. Finding a confidante is a common strategy for a child who has assessed their risk and wants to find someone to share their problems with. And participating in festivals is a good

opportunity to meet potential confidantes. As the example of 'confidante' illustrates, it was found that in all themes, to a greater or lesser extent, resilience factors both caused and affected each other.

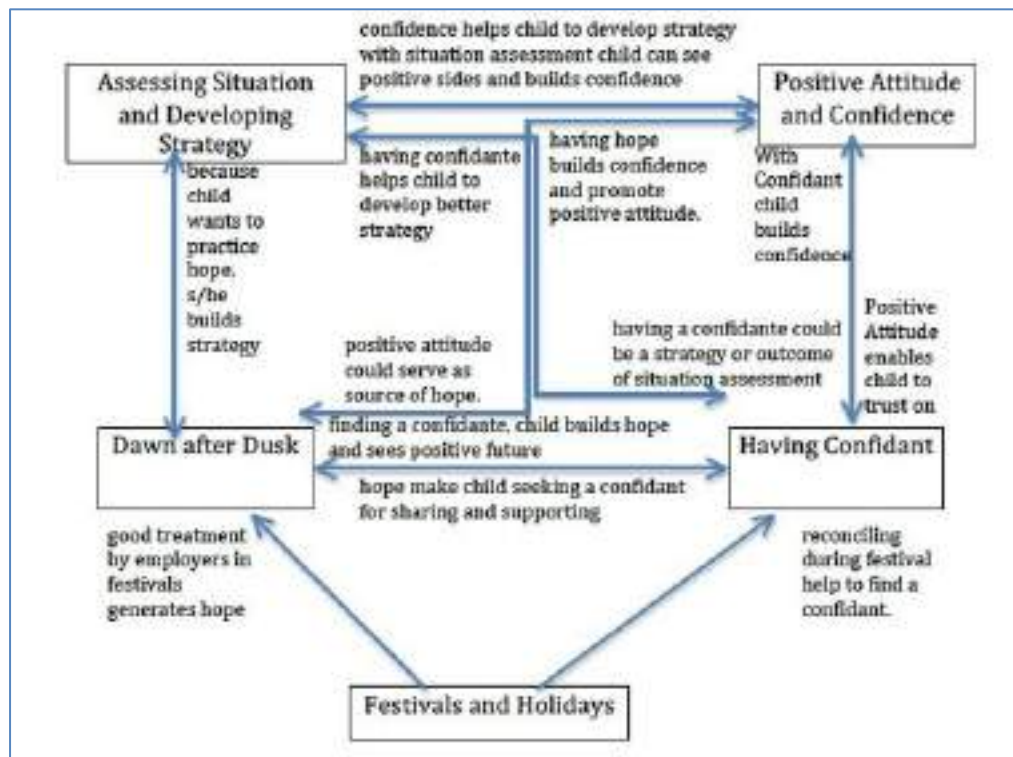


Figure 1: Resilience Flow Chart

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