Socio-Economic Determinants of Child Labour in the Hospitality Industry of Birendranagar, Surkhet

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Abstract

Background: Child labour remains a critical global issue, defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, hindering their physical and mental development. Despite Nepal's ratification of numerous international conventions and the establishment of national laws to combat it, child labour persists, with an estimated 1.1 million children engaged in work. The hospitality industry is one sector where this exploitation is

prevalent. This study focuses on the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors driving child labour in the hospitality industry of Birendranagar, the capital of Karnali Province, which has the highest child labour rate in Nepal.

Objective: The general objective of this research is to explore and analyze the key socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to the prevalence of child labour in the hospitality industry of Birendranagar, Surkhet.

Methods: This study employed a quantitative research design. Data were collected in 2024 from 104 child labourers working in hospitality establishments in Birendranagar-07, Surkhet, using a convenience sampling method. Primary data were gathered through a semi-structured questionnaire, covering socio-demographic characteristics and the causes of child labour. Simple frequency distributions were used for data analysis, with results presented in descriptive and tabular forms.

Findings: The study revealed that the majority of child labourers were male (89.42%) and aged between 12-16 years (69.23%). The primary drivers of child labour were economic: the pursuit of financial independence (36.54%) and poverty (36.53%) were the most cited reasons, with 44.23% of respondents working to increase their family's basic income. Cultural factors played a significant role, with 53.85% of respondents acknowledging its influence; 30.36% believed cultural acceptance normalizes child labour. Key social factors included a lack of community support for education (36.54%) and peer pressure to join the workforce (29.81%). A majority (62.50%) of respondents did not believe parental negligence was a cause.

Conclusion: The prevalence of child labour in Birendranagar's hospitality sector is a multifaceted problem rooted in acute economic deprivation, compelling children to seek work for survival and financial autonomy. This economic driver is reinforced by cultural norms that normalize child work and social systems that fail to provide adequate educational and recreational alternatives. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond legislation to tackle the deep-seated economic and socio-cultural underpinnings.

Implication: The findings provide critical evidence for federal and provincial governments to formulate targeted policies and interventions aimed at creating a child labour-free society. The study also offers practical insights for NGOs and INGOs working in child protection, emphasizing the need for initiatives that address poverty alleviation, shift cultural perceptions, strengthen community support for education, and enforce child rights.

Keywords: Child Labour, Socio-economic Factors, Cultural Influence, Hospitality Industry, Poverty, Birendranagar, Nepal.

1. Introduction

Although children are covered by all international human rights treaties, only the Convention specifies exactly who is considered a child. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Opportunity for Advocates, a child is any human being under the age of eighteen. Unless otherwise specified by domestic law, the majority is reached at the age of 18 (Jupp, 1990). The term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their

childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. According to the ILO 2014, children begin working at a very young age all around the world. When they are six or seven years old, they might be assisting their parents in the fields, doing errands, and performing domestic duties. Because it is thought that these activities can help a child's growth and development, adults in the family frequently encourage them. In this way, work serves as a gateway to the world of adult employment and income and is a necessary component of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Unfortunately, many youngsters work in jobs that, rather than improving their lives, impair their growth and development. This is known as child labour. Child labor includes any work that is damaging to a child's health or development (International Labour Organization, 2014). Child labour is work that, due to its nature and the conditions in which it occurs, harms a child's well-being, abuses and exploits children, and obstructs or impedes their education, development, and future life. This work can be compensated or not, may occur within the marketplace or outside of it, and can consist of either regular or occasional employment(International Labour Organization, 2018).

While talking about the major causes of child labor are poverty. Children work because their families rely on them for earnings or household chores, particularly unpaid care work, which is often handled by girls. Child labor is often linked to poverty, informality, inadequate social safety, and lack of access to education (International Labour Organization & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Furthermore, covariate shocks that affect communities, regions, or countries, such as natural catastrophes, health epidemics, environmental calamities, political instability, and economic hazards that frequently result in loss of revenue, are also major drivers of child labor (Bhandary et al., n.d.).According to the GSS Child Labour Study (2003), some of the primary reasons for child labor include poverty and a lack of sustainable livelihood practices (both cash and food gathering practices), a lack of alternative forms of livelihood, poor parental care and family breakdowns, loss of parents due to death and stress in the family, and a poor quality of service(Casely-Hayford, 2004).

In Nepal, a significant portion of children are forced to work to support themselves or their families. To pay for the costs of pursuing higher education, a sizable percentage of them also work part-time. These kids usually have a strong sense of self-motivation to put in a lot of effort and are committed to finding ways to enhance their prospects for the future (World Education, 2009). There are many more pull factors associated with child labor that contribute to the continuation of poverty, hunger, and starvation. People have more children than they can raise because of an ignorant society, or parents may divorce, leaving the children homeless and requiring them to begin working at an early age to pay for their food (Tripathi, 2023). Lack of educational opportunities and loss of parents were the main causes of child labor in the Thamel's hospitality industry (Neupane, 2023). A number of factors contribute to child labor, including family type, income, landholding size, loan status, class, parent education and occupation, caste/ethnicity, and religious background. Low family income was one of the main causes of child labor among these categories (Acharya, 2018).

Nepal has several national and international legislative tools in place to combat forced labor and prohibit child labor. The international conventions that Nepal has ratified to combat child labour are: ILO Convention No. 138 (on minimum age), ILO Convention No. 182 (on worst forms of child labour), ILO Convention No. 29 (on forced labour), ILO Convention No. 105 (on abolition of forced labour), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and (Palermo) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children(Baniya et al., 2024). Despite all these efforts, a significant number of children are still working as child laborers in various sectors, enterprises, and informally (Tripathi, 2023). Among the seven million children (total children) between the ages of 5 and 17 in Nepal, 1.1 million children (15.3%) were found to be engaged in child labour. According to the Nepal Child Labour Report 2021, the biggest percentage of children aged 5 to 17 work in Karnali (24.6%), followed by Sudurpashchim (20.9%), Province 1 (17.6%), Gandaki (16.1%), Lumbini (15.8%), Province 2 (11.5%), and Bagmati (8.9%). Karnali, the least developed province, has the highest child labor rates (International Labour Organization & Nepal, 2021). The study called 'The Situation of Child Labour in Nepal: An Analysis (With Reference to Karnali Province)' has claimed the causes of child labor are economic poverty, a lack of access to high-quality education, social acceptance, a lack of political commitment, a lack of attention from stakeholders, conflict, a changing family environment, modern information technology, and social media misuse (Rokaya & Bk, 2020).

Research Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore and analyze the key socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to the prevalence of child labour in the hospitality industry of Birendranagar, Surkhet.

2. Method and Materials

This study follows a quantitative research design, aiming to describe and analyze the socio-economic and institutional factors influencing child labour in the hospitality industry of Birendranagar, Surkhet. All collected data are presented in descriptive and tabulated forms to ensure clarity and systematic interpretation.

The study area for this research is Birendranagar-07, located in Surkhet district, Nepal. The research was conducted in 2024. Birendranagar serves as the district headquarters as well as the capital city of Karnali Province, making it a central hub for employment and economic activity, including the hospitality sector, where child labour is often prevalent.

The population of the study comprised all child labourers working in various establishments across Birendranagar. From this universe, a total of 104 child labourers were selected as the sample population using the convenience sampling method. This approach was chosen to ensure accessibility and feasibility in reaching participants actively engaged in the hospitality industry.

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were gathered through a semi-structured questionnaire and a checklist. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Group A focused on the socio-demographic characteristics of the child labourers, while Group B included questions designed to identify and analyze the underlying causes of child labour. In addition, secondary data were obtained from various published and unpublished sources such as books, journals, articles, research reports, and dissertations related to child labour issues.

For data analysis, simple frequency distributions were employed to carry out quantitative analysis. This method allowed the study to present the socio-demographic patterns and prevalence of causative factors in clear numerical and percentage forms, facilitating easy interpretation and understanding of trends related to child labour in the hospitality sector of Birendranagar.

3. Results

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondent

Socio-demographics include age, education, religion, employment, marital status, income levels, migration background, race, and ethnicity (Busayo Longe, 2025). The study had collected the socio-demographic characteristics of students, like age, gender, and types of family.

Age Composition

It is widely believed that chronological time dictates our age; In other words, a person's age is based only on the duration of their existence (Räsänen, 2021). The age composition of the respondents is categorized into four groups, which are presented in the following table:

Table 1: Status of Age Composition of the Respondents

Age (Years)	No. of Respondents	Percent
8-9	11	10.58
10-11	21	20.19
12-13	33	31.73
14-16	39	37.50
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows the age composition of the respondents. Out of the total respondents, 10.58 percent were aged between 8-9 years, 20.19 percent were aged between 10-11 years, 31.73 percent were aged between 12-13 years, and 37.50 percent were aged between 14-16 years. Children are more prone to engage in labor as they become older, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of child laborers are between the ages of 12 and 16. Due to their perceived physical prowess, this age group is frequently chosen for physically demanding jobs that interfere with their schooling and development.

Gender Composition

Behavioural norms applied to men and women in society, known as gender roles, influence individuals' everyday actions, expectations, and experiences(Pelletti et al., 2022). The gender composition of the respondents is presented in the following table:

Table 2: Status of Gender

Gender Composition	No. of Respondents	Percent
Male	93	89.42
Female	11	10.58
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows the gender composition of the respondents. Among the total respondents, 89.42 percentage were male and 10.58 percent were female. Child labor is greatly impacted by gender, with a greater percentage of men being engaged in labor-intensive jobs as a result of social pressures and financial constraints. Boys are more likely to work in dangerous jobs, which adds to the high rate of child labor.

Type of Family

A family consists of a network of individuals connected through blood relations, marriage, adoption, or fostering, and can take on various forms and sizes. No one type of family can be considered universal or singular. Common family types or structures include single parents with children, nuclear families made up of two parents and their children, and extended families that consist of one or two parents, their children, and other relatives (Hassan & Page, 2025). The type of family of the respondents is presented in the following table:

Table 3: Types of Family.

Type of Family	No. of Respondents	Percent
Nuclear	81	77.88
Joint	23	22.12
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 shows the type of family of the respondents. Of the total respondents, 77.88 percent belonged to nuclear families, while 22.12 percent belonged to joint families. Because fewer family members are sharing financial responsibilities, children from nuclear households may be more vulnerable to child labor. Joint families, on the other hand, frequently divide up duties, which would lessen the need for kids to work.

3.2 Causes of Child Labour

Different factors contributing to child labour include the poverty curse, insufficient educational resources, social and economic underdevelopment, addiction, illness or disability, attraction of inexpensive labour, familial customs, and gender discrimination(Suresh Lal, 2019). This section of the chapter consists of the various causes of child labour, which are presented in different sub-sections as follows:

3.2.1   General Causes

Table 4: General Causes of Child Labour

Causes of Leaving Home	No. of Respondents	Percent
Lack of educational opportunities	26	25.00
Desire for social interaction	11	10.58
Family conflict	29	27.88
Financial independence	38	36.54
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The above table shows the primary reason for being engaged in labor. Among the total respondents, 25.00 percent cited a lack of educational opportunities, 10.58 percent desired social interaction, 36.54 percent sought financial independence, and the remaining respondents mentioned family conflict. Child work is significantly influenced by the need for financial independence and a lack of education. Children who have few other options are compelled to labor to provide for their families.

3.2.2   Factors *that* forced *people* into *labor*

The respondents were asked if they were forced by someone to be engaged in child labour, and the responses obtained from them are presented in the following table:

Table 5: What Factors Forced Children into Child Labor

Persons	No. of Respondents	Percent
Family	27	25.96
Friend	10	9.62
Relative	11	10.58
Society	18	17.31
Poverty	38	36.53
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 shows the factors that forced respondents into child labor. Among the total respondents, 25.96 percent were forced by family, 9.62 percent by friends, 10.58 percent by relatives, 17.31 percent by society, and 36.53 percent cited poverty. Poverty and family pressure are the leading causes forcing children into labor. The socio-economic context often compels families to make difficult choices, pushing their children into early employment.

3.2.3   Parental Negligence as a Cause of Child Labour

Parental awareness as a cause of child labour describes how parents don't recognize how child labour affects their children's growth and education. The respondents were asked if parental awareness is a cause of child labour, and the responses obtained from them are presented in the following table:

Table 6: Parental Negligence as a Cause of Child Labour

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
Yes	39	37.50
No	65	62.50
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The above table shows parental awareness as a cause of child labor. Of the total respondents, 37.50 percent believed parental awareness contributed to child labor, while 62.50 percent did not. A lack of parental awareness about the consequences of child labor exacerbates the issue. Educating parents about the long-term negative impacts on their children could help reduce the incidence of child labor.

3.2.4   Economic Causes of Child Labor

It is often low-income families and their children who are the first to experience hardship, which can drive many more at-risk children into situations of child labor (Gatsinzi, 2022). Child workers are often exploited due to factors like poverty, limited job prospects for adults, and the need for cheap labor. The respondents were asked about the factors that contribute to child labour in hotels/restaurants, and the responses obtained from them are presented in the following table:

Table 7: Contribution of Economic Factors to Child Labour

Influence	No. of Respondents	Percent
High wages for adult workers	17	16.35
Lack of demand for hotel/restaurant services	10	9.62
Low wages and exploitation of child labor	31	29.81
Increases basic income for families	46	44.23
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 7 shows the contribution of economic factors to child labor. Of the total respondents, 16.35 percent cited high wages for adult workers, 9.62 percent mentioned lack of demand for hotel/restaurant services, 29.81 percent referred to low wages and exploitation of child labor, and 44.23 percent cited the need to increase basic family income. Economic necessity is a primary driver of child labor. Children are often seen as a source of supplemental income, especially in low-wage sectors like hotels and restaurants, leading to their exploitation.

3.2.5   Influence of Culture to be Engaged in Child Labour

Influence of culture to be engaged in child labour refers to cultural norms and practices that may condone or support child labour. In some societies, it is customary to have children work for the family's benefit, as this is seen as a way to guide them into independent adulthood. We don't consider it bad because even our ancestors in their time attempted to socialize us through various activities that shaped us into the independent mothers and fathers we are today(Waziri, 2019). The respondents were asked if they were influenced by any cultural factors to be

engaged in child labour and the responses obtained from them are presented in the following table:

Table 8: Influence of Culture to be Engaged in Child Labour

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
Yes	56	53.85
No	48	46.15
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 8 shows the influence of culture on engagement in child labor. Among the respondents, 53.85 percent agreed that culture influences child labor, while 46.15 percent did not believe.

Role of Culture Promoting Child Labor

Culture plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and practices related to child labour. In many communities, child work is often viewed as a traditional norm rather than a violation of rights. Cultural beliefs that children should contribute to family income or learn skills through early involvement in work tend to normalize child labour. In some societies, working children are even considered obedient, responsible, and supportive to their families, which reinforces acceptance of the practice. Moreover, intergenerational poverty, combined with traditional gender roles and social expectations, often pushes children—especially from marginalized groups—into labor-intensive jobs. In the context of Nepal, including Birendranagar, such cultural acceptance, coupled with weak enforcement of child rights and economic hardship, perpetuates the continuation of child labour in informal sectors like hospitality.

Table 9: Role of Culture Promoting Child Labor

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
Cultural reduces the incidence of child labor	16	28.57
Cultural acceptance normalizes child labor	17	30.36
Cultural acceptance has no impact on child labor	14	25.00
Others	9	16.07
Total	**56**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 9 illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding the role of culture in promoting child labour. Out of 56 respondents, the largest proportion (30.36%) believed that cultural acceptance tends to normalize child labour, suggesting that traditional beliefs and social norms make it more acceptable for children to engage in work from an early age. About 28.57% of respondents, however, felt that culture actually helps reduce the incidence of child labour, possibly indicating that some cultural or ethical values discourage child exploitation. Meanwhile, 25% of respondents stated that cultural factors have no significant impact on child labour, reflecting mixed awareness or differing cultural experiences. The remaining 16.07% provided other responses, highlighting diverse individual perspectives on how cultural attitudes influence child labour practices within their communities. Overall, the findings indicate that

cultural perceptions remain an important, though complex, factor shaping the prevalence of child.

3.2.6   *Social* Factor Contributing to Child Labour

The social aspects that contribute to child labor include polygamy, early marriage, and family conflict(Joseph, 2023). The respondents were asked about the social factors that contribute to child labour, and the responses obtained from them are presented in the following table:

Table 10: Social Factor Contributing to Child Labour

Social Factor	No. of Respondents	Percent
No community support for education	38	36.54
Less accessibility to recreational facilities	26	25.00
Pressure from peers to join the workforce	31	29.81
All of the above	9	8.65
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 10 shows that out of the total respondents, 36.54 percent mentioned no community support for education, 25.00 percent referred to less accessibility to recreational facilities, 29.81 percent cited peer pressure to join the workforce, and 8.65 percent mentioned all factors. Lack of educational and recreational opportunities, combined with peer pressure, contributes to the prevalence of child labor. Without access to these resources, children are more likely to enter the workforce.

4. Discussions

According to the findings' summary, 36.54% of children work to become financially independent. Because they want to spend their money according to your choices, they don't want to ask money to buy clothes and other things from their parents. However, poverty was mentioned by 36.53%. Families send their children to work when they can't afford to provide them with food, shelter, clothes, and education. According to 44.23 percent of respondents, they are striving to raise their family's base income. 53.85% of respondents concurred that cultural factors are a significant factor in child labor. In the context of Surkhet, children are expected to acquire skills at a young age in a community where labor is viewed as a means of preparing them for maturity. The belief that one's suffering is a part of one's fate or karma is one example of a cultural and religious belief that pushed children to work. There are many cultural factors, i.e., due to a lack of community support for education, 36.54 percent of children are employed.

This study claims that poverty is one of the causes of child employment. Consistent with previous research findings, abroad, Child employment is more frequent in countries with higher poverty rates (Thévenon, Olivier, & Edmonds, 2019). Similarly, in Nepal, poverty is the most common cause of child labour (Joshi et al., 2011). According to the findings of our article, children working to increase their basic family income is another cause of the employment of minors. This supports the finding of Jennie (2009 that the majority of children in developing nations work because they wish to support their families (Jennie, 2009). In line with the related

literature, which argues that child labor in Pakistan is the outcome of various social, cultural factors (Naz et al., 2019). Similarly, the findings of our study also suggest that child labour is the result of the influence of culture.

Implication: A major practical implication of this research is its contribution to the federal and provincial governments to make a child labor-free society by identifying the various causes of child labor. It evaluates the immediate impacts on families and communities that encourage young children to work objectively. This study has strong implications for different NGOs and INGOs that are working in the area of children.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights that child labor in the hospitality industry of Birendranagar, Surkhet, is driven by multiple interrelated socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Poverty remains the primary cause, motivating families to send their children to work to supplement household income. Cultural beliefs and practices also play a significant role, often viewing child labor as a traditional means of preparing children for independence and adult responsibilities. Additionally, a lack of community support and insufficient access to recreational and educational opportunities exacerbate the prevalence of child labor. Despite ongoing efforts by the government, the rates of child labor persist, underscoring the need for targeted, multifaceted interventions to address its root causes effectively.

To mitigate child labor in the region, government authorities, NGOs, and community stakeholders need to collaborate in developing comprehensive programs. Enhancing educational facilities and promoting the importance of education can offer children better alternatives to labor. Social awareness campaigns should aim to challenge cultural norms that tolerate or support child labor and emphasize the rights of children to education and leisure. Economic support initiatives, such as cash transfer programs or income-generating activities for families, can alleviate poverty and reduce the necessity of child employment. Furthermore, strengthening community support mechanisms and establishing supportive recreational and skill development opportunities will empower children and families to break free from the cycle of child labor, fostering a sustainable and child-friendly environment.

Transparency Statement: We confirm that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.
Data Availability Statement: Authors can provide data.
Conflict of Interest: The authors declare there is no conflicts of interest.
Authors' Contributions: The authors conducted all research activities i.e., concept, data collecting, drafting and final review of manuscript.

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