



The impact of COVID-19 on girls working in the AES in Nepal
Gender and Poverty Dimensions of COVID-19 in LMICs webinar
Bristol Poverty Institute
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Outline of the presentation

- i) **GAGE and the AES study**
- ii) Background: the AES sector and life of girls in the AES (normal times)
- iii) AES during COVID
- iv) How patterns of work changed during COVID-19 lockdown
- v) Implications of the lockdown on vulnerability
- vi) Coping mechanisms
- vii) Some recommendations

The AES and life of girls in the AES (normal times)

What constitutes AES: Establishment based and freelance

Work in the AES

Who are girls

How do they enter this sector

AES during COVID

- Remained largely closed/Informal arrangements in establishments /freelancers
- Decrease in number of clients- both physical and online based.

“Now we do not have customers. Previously we had 3-5 customers a day if we wanted. Now we do not get customers every day. We get 1-2 in 3-4 days. So we do not have work” (IDI, street based worker, Sunsari)

- Change in working hours and challenges to women with children

“ Now, due to lockdown, it happens only in mornings and evenings. Clients tell their family that they are going for morning/evening walks and visit the girls”. (KII-7, NGO representative, Kathmandu)

- Less demand- no Indian clients/new girls (including foreigners-Chinese, Malaysian and African) offering service for less

“Now there are 16-17 women who have come from Africa. Since they were staying in hotels and giving service from there before the lockdown, it was not a big challenge for our girls. But now, they have come to the streets. You will see them at night in Thamel in groups. They charge around \$5-\$6 (Rs.500-600) only. So, it’s been difficult for Nepali girls and women.” (KII-2, NGO representative, Kathmandu)

Implications of the lockdown on vulnerability

- Food insecurity including for children

“There is no food for children. Single mothers see their hungry children and are breaking down. They say give us some money we will buy poison and kill our children and kill ourselves. (KII-3, NGO worker, Sunsari)”

“Girls are desperate. The transportation workers know this. So, they buy a plate of noodles and make the girl provide service to many boys. Sometimes they just buy a glass of local beer”

- Homelessness: Girls pushed out to live in public spaces under bridges, parks etc and exchange sex for sleeping in trucks and cars.
- Increased GBV: from clients, police, employers, intimate partners, others, upon return

“The transportation workers prey on girls living under bridges. They know girls are hungry. So they purposefully intoxicate girls in the evening and gang rape them at night.”

- Increased separations, infidelity having more physical and emotional challenges for girls
- girls using drugs more prone to IPV,
- increased surveillance and physical violence inflicted by the police
- Blackmailing for sex from clients upon return home

Contd.

- Vulnerability to COVID infection

“I am sitting outside of a hotel here in Birta. I know the girl who has just gone with a client is giving oral sex service. Young girls are now involved in this kind of work and I don’t know what to do. Clients also demand this highly now and are ready to pay more for this. Girls have lost income so will do whatever it takes to earn money. They are new to this work and we don’t know how to protect them from COVID. Once she comes out, my intention is to counsel her and try to make her understand the risks.” (KII-12, SRH service provider, Jhapa)

- Vulnerability to pregnancy and other SRH infections and increased pregnancy

“Yes at first, they have this attitude- we give you money-do what we say. And they do not want to wear masks or contraceptives.” (IDI, AES worker, 17 years, Ratnapark)

Coping? -Survival Strategies

Use savings

Work for less money/food

Tailoring service as per demand of the clients

"They do (haggle over payment). They want to give less money.

Do you negotiate with them?

Well, I need the money, so I just go". (IDI, street based worker, 21 years, Sunsari)

Alternative livelihoods

Cutting down food and basic hygiene

Selling assets

Helping in childcare

Girls group

Helping each other with clients

What girls learnt and recommendations

Revisited exploitative relationships- with partners, employers and took decisions that works for them

Girls group and agency

Learnt value of savings

Learnt value of alternative livelihoods that are less risky

-Use new learnings to influence girls to move away from risky jobs and take saving habits/exlore alternative livelihoods

Activate and create awareness on secondary reporting mechanisms:

Tackle issues related to deprivation of basic human rights of children - right to food, shelter and protection and extend SP to children

Upgrade district level Disaster Risk Management Plans (DRRM) to include social implications of disaster and include health emergencies along with the current natural disasters.

Contact us

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About GAGE:

- Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year (2015-2024) mixed-methods longitudinal research programme focused on what works to support adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities in the second decade of life and beyond.
- We are following the lives of 18,000 adolescents in six focal countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

