



Unveiling the Plight of Child Labour in Nepal's Hotel and Restaurant Sector

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the current situation of child labour in Kathmandu's hotel and restaurant industry. Utilizing a quantitative research design, the study focuses on male child workers who are employed in hotels, restaurants, tea shops, bus stations, and other informal sectors in Kathmandu. Using the convenient sampling method, a total of 147 male child labourers were selected. Frequency distributions and chi-square tests were used among the univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistical methods. The results showed that the Janajatis and the Dalits were excessively represented among the child labourers, with the majority (61.22%) being between the ages of 12 and 15. The majority of children were from those families with unstable housing, high parental illiteracy (51.70%), and poor economic circumstances. Of the respondents, more than 81% had dropout of school, mainly as a result of personal choice, lack of good parenting, or household duties. These kids were frequently working over 12 hours a day at physically demanding jobs, mainly cooking, dishwashing, and customer service. Health problems also mainly; skin disease, throat infections, and hand pain were also found with them. Particularly, 61.2% of the respondents reported that they were unhappy with their jobs. Working hours and job dissatisfaction ($p < 0.01$), age and dropout rates ($p < 0.05$), and parental literacy and school enrolment ($p < 0.01$) were found statistically significant in the bivariate analysis. These findings denote that child labour has deeper roots in systemic injustice, social marginalisation, and a lack of educational support, not just an economic problem.

Introduction

Children are considered symbols of progress, potential and hope. Children are as fragile as raw clay; they need to be provided with adequate attention, protection, and opportunities to grow into capable and responsible adults (Schweiger, 2025). However, the situation of millions of children around the world, especially in developing countries like Nepal, is comparatively very different (Koirala, 2025). When it comes to child rights, it is apparent that many children are deprived of basic human rights, including access to education, healthcare, and a safe environment to grow up, due to the widespread problem of child labour (Ansari et al., 2025; de Groot, 2007). There are many areas where child labour persists, with the hotel and restaurant industry becoming a serious concern in urban centers such as Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal (Basnyat & Pal, 2025).

Child labour in Nepal is not new; its roots are deep into the country's socio-economic structure. Especially in rural areas, poverty and lack of opportunities force families to employ their children at a young age to earn an income (Childs et al., 2025; Sharma, 2024). Despite the development of various legal frameworks and international agreements to end exploitative child labour, it is still mysteriously prevalent in both organized and unorganized sectors of the economy. The International Labour Organization estimates that two million children in Nepal are employed. Most children perform hazardous work that endangers their physical, mental, and emotional development and get their adulthood worse (ILO, 2012; Maharjan, 2015).

The concept of child labour is often confused with child work. Child labour includes activities that are harmful, exploitative, and

detrimental to a child's general well-being, whereas child work refers to activities that are constructive, so positively impact a child's development (Aufseeser et al., 2018; Bansah & Adonteng-Kissi, 2025). The main reasons for placing children in hazardous work environments are long working hours, low or no wages, and a lack of safety measures. Children working in informal sectors, especially domestic service, agriculture, brick kilns, and hospitals, often remain invisible and outside the protection of labour laws. This shows that more efforts are needed to provide adequate safety and protection for children working in these sectors (Ali et al., 2017; Mishra, 2025).

As can be observed, a significant increase takes place in the involvement of child labourers in the hotel and restaurant sector in Kathmandu Valley. The main reasons for this are poverty, limited access to education, growing population, and weak enforcement of child labour laws (Upadhyay, 2019; Gurung, 2019; Hanane et al., 2024). Many children who migrate from rural areas to cities in search of employment are forced into exploitative work without a safe environment or adequate protection. They are employed in hotels and restaurants as dishwashers, cleaners, kitchen helpers, or food handlers. Although these jobs are physically demanding, they are not provided with adequate rest, decent wages, or necessary protection. This poses serious risks not only to their health but also to their long-term future (Bhatta, 2022; Seyitoğlu et al., 2024).

In the Nepali context, sons are favored over daughters, which is a significant issue of gender discrimination. This is because girls are often forced to do domestic work in hotels and restaurants, where they are at risk of discrimination, sexual exploitation, and

abuse. Boys, on the other hand, are subjected to more physical labour, which can lead to injuries and long-term health problems (Hossain et al., 2025; Joshi, 2013; Khatri et al., 2025). Both groups are kept in a cycle of vulnerability and poverty due to limited access to social services, health care, and education.

Although good policies and programmes were formulated in Nepal, they are mostly not implemented properly. For example, despite legal provisions prohibiting the employment of children under 14, many child labourers, are found to be of this age. The government efforts are often unsuccessful due to corruption, lack of public awareness, and weak monitoring systems. This shows that even though policies and laws exist, ensuring their effective implementation is challenging (Aryal, 2025). In addition, since much of the work is informal in nature, it is challenging to monitor and control child labour, especially in the hospitality sector.

The ILO and other international organizations have played a key role for drawing attention to the problem and supporting efforts to eliminate child labour. However, more needs to be done in Nepal, from the grassroots to the policy level, to ensure that every child can fully benefit from the rights and guaranteed by the international human rights law (Adhikari, 2004; Sahani, 2024; Oli, 2025).

The main objective of this study is to investigate the current situation of child labour in hotels and restaurants in Kathmandu. Therefore, this study examines the socio-economic factors that affect child labour and also assesses the working conditions of the child workers. To address child labour and build a safe and secure future for Nepal's youngest citizens, government agencies,

civil society organizations, employers, and communities must work together. Therefore, this study attempts to identify the key factors associated with child labour in Kathmandu Valley and understand their impacts.

Methodology

The research used the quantitative design to uncover the hidden aspects of child labour and analyze the current situation of children engaged in various occupations such as hotels, restaurants, bus stations, tea shops, construction sites, and brick factories in Kathmandu Valley. While the secondary data came from books, journals, dissertations, government reports, and published and unpublished documents; the primary data were gathered through field visits using structured interview schedules, using a convenient sampling technique. However, 147 male child workers were chosen from the targeted sectors. An interview schedule was used for data collection. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 20 BM for data editing, coding, recoding. The data were examined using univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis. The frequency and percentage distribution of the required variables were described through univariate analysis, while χ^2 (chi-square) tests were used in bivariate and multivariate analysis to understand the relationships between the selected variables.

Results

The study recruited 147 male child labourers working in Kathmandu Valley and analyzed key themes such as socio-demographic characteristics of the child labourers, family background, parental education level, working conditions, health-related problems, and job satisfaction.

Table 1: Age Distribution of Child Workers
(*N* = 147)

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
6–9	5	3.4
9–12	50	34
12–15	90	61
Total	147	100

Children between the ages of 12 and 15 made up the largest percentage of child labourers (61.2%), followed by those between the ages of 9 and 12 (34%). Only 3.4% of the population was younger, aged 6 to 9 years. Older children's ability to manage their own responsibilities were found to make them more likely to migrate for employment.

Table 2: Ethnic Composition of Child Workers

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Janajati	84	57.1
Dalit	28	19
Brahmin	18	12.2
Chhetri	17	11.6
Total	147	100

The majority of the child workers were found the Janajati children (57.1%), followed by the Dalits (19%), the Brahmins (12.2%), and the Chhetris (11.6%) (Table 2). The findings indicate that the marginalised ethnic groups, especially the Janajatis and the Dalits are suspiciously affected by child labour, which reflects larger social and economic disparities that restrict their access to opportunities and education.

Table 3: Family Size

Family Members	Frequency	Percentage (%)
≤5	37	25.2
5–7	80	54.5
≥8	30	20.4
Total	147	100

Families with five to seven members accounted for the majority of the child labours (54.47%), while families with eight or more members accounted for 20.40% (Table 3). Smaller families accounted for just 25.17%. Having many family members in a household was a factor leading to financial crisis which made it difficult for the head of the family to run the household. Therefore, it was found that, it forced the children to work to supplement the household income. Thus, a large family was also a major factor in child labour.

Table 4: Parental Status

Parental Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Both alive	82	55.9
Mother deceased	38	25.9
Father deceased	14	9.5
Orphaned	13	8.8
Total	147	100

Table 4 shows that 55.9% of the child labourers had both parents still living, whereas the remaining individuals had either lost one or both of their parents. Interestingly, 8.8% were orphans and 25.9% had lost their mothers. Most of the working children came from households where both parents were alive, although the death of a parent is a major factor for child labour. This suggests that economic hardship is one of the main factors pushing children into the workforce, even more so than the complete absence of a parent.

Table 5: Parental Education Status

Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Both illiterate	76	51.7
Only father literate	34	23.1
Only mother literate	22	15
Both parents educated	15	10.2
Total	147	100

Only 10.2% of the child labourers had parents who were both educated, while over half (51.7%) had both illiterate parents (Table 5). Illiterate parents do not understand the importance of education. Child labour has increased because they do not understand that their children's education will make them happy. This points to a strong link between parental illiteracy and child labour. Also, low parental education level had a significant association between children dropping out of school and entering child labour.

Table 6: *Land Ownership and Housing Conditions*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Land Ownership		
No land	49	33.3
<0.1 ropani	56	38.1
Others	42	28.6
Housing Type		
Permanent house	90	61.2
Temporary shelter	57	38.8

The low economic status of the families of the child labourers is highlighted in Table 6. High levels of landlessness and limited assets were indicated by the fact that 38.1% of the families had fewer than 0.1 ropani of land, and 33.3% of the families owned no land. A noteworthy 38.8% of people lived in temporary shelters, indicating housing insecurity, although 61.2% of the people lived in permanent homes. These findings prove that poverty and precarious livelihoods were the main reasons why children enter labour.

Table 7: *School Enrollment and Dropout*

Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Currently enrolled	27	18.4
Dropped out	120	81.6
Total	147	100

Only 18.4% of the child labourers were still enrolled in school, while the vast majority (81.6%) had dropped out (Table 7). Child labour often comes at the cost of education. The results indicate that the high fear of dropping out of school, the lack of understanding of the importance of education, and the need to drop out of school to provide financial support for families also highlight the need for intervention to implement child rights.

Table 8: *Education Level Attained by Dropouts (N = 120)*

Level Attained	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	57	47.6
Lower Secondary	29	24.4
Secondary	11	9.52
Not Specified	23	18.4
Total	120	100

Nearly half (47.6%) of the 120 child labourers who had left school had only finished the primary level, and 24.4% had attained the lower secondary level (Table 8). 18.43% of the child labourers did not specify their education. Only 9.5% of them had completed the secondary level of education. According to the results, most children dropped out of school early, which led to a situation where they were unable to complete further education due to poverty and lack of support. This seems to be against the children's rights.

Table 9: *Reasons for Dropping Out of School (N = 120)*

Reason	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Work at home	25	21.2
Personal will	38	31.3
Not sent by parents	28	23.1
Others	24	20.4
Not mentioned	5	4.17
Total	120	100

The primary causes of school dropouts among the 120 child labourers were personal preference (31.3%), parental absence (23.1%), and the necessity of working from home (21.2%), according (Table 9). 20.4% reported other causes, and 4.17% did not provide a reason. These results show that children's decisions to drop out of school were influenced by a mix of personal preferences, family circumstances, and economic pressures. This highlights how complex and multifaceted the barriers to children's educational continuity are.

Table 10: Nature of Work

Type of Work	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Washing dishes	43	29.3
Cooking	40	27.2
Serving customers	32	21.8
Multiple tasks	32	21.8
Total	147	100

According to the study, the highest number of the child labourers were engaged in cooking (27.2%) and washing dishes (29.3%), followed by children serving customers and performing miscellaneous tasks (21.8%). This shows that the children were often involved in low-paid and physically demanding jobs in unorganized industries, such as accommodation and food services, and are often shouldering multiple responsibilities to meet the demands of the job.

Table 11: Working Hours per Day

Hours Worked	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<4 hours	13	8.8
4–8 hours	16	10.9
8–12 hours	50	34.0
>12 hours	68	46.3
Total	147	100

As seen in Table 11, 34% of the child labourers worked 8–12 hours per day, while about half

of them (46.3%) worked more than 12 hours. Only a small proportion worked less than eight hours per day. This shows that most children are involved in excessively long hours of work, which can have a negative impact on their overall development.

Table 12: Duration of Employment

Duration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<6 months	43	29.3
6–12 months	56	38.1
1.5–2 years	23	15.6
>2 years	10	6.8
Not reported	15	10.2
Total	147	100

Table 12 indicates that 29.3% of the child labourers had worked for less than six months, while 38.1% had worked for six to twelve months. The employment tenure of many child labourers was generally short. Only 6.80% of the child labourers had worked for more than two years. This shows a high job turnover rate among the child labourers, which could possibly be a result of the seasonal nature of the work, difficult working conditions, or children leaving jobs in search of other opportunities.

Table 13: Monthly Income

Income Range (NPR)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<5,000	13	8.8
5,000–10,000	50	34
10,000–15,000	36	24.5
>15,000	48	32.7
Total	147	100

As can be seen in Table 13, the range of difference in the monthly income of child labourers was large. The largest group earned between Rs. 5,000 and 10,000 (34%) and followed by those earning more than Rs. 15,000 (32.7%). Only 8.84% earned less than Rs. 5,000, while 24.5% earned between

Rs. 10,000 and 15,000. This indicates that some children earned less while the others earned relatively more, possibly as a result of working in more professional or semi-formal workplaces.

Table 14: Reported Health Problems

Health Issue	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pain in hands	44	29.9
Skin cracking	20	13.6
Throat infection	20	13.6
Common cold	18	12.2
Teeth problems	9	6.1
No health problems	40	27.2
Total	147	100

The results show that child labourers suffer from various health problems (Table 14). The most common problem is hand pain (29.9%), followed by skin rashes and throat infections (13.6% each). Although 27.2% of them reported no have had health problems, common cold and dental problems were also reported. These facts show that adequate occupational health protection is necessary for the child labourers, as these health problems are often caused by physically demanding work and adverse environments.

Table 15: Job Satisfaction

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satisfied	57	38.8
Dissatisfied	90	61.2
Total	147	100

Only 38.8% of child labourers said they were satisfied with their work, while the majority (61.2%) were dissatisfied (Table 15). Long working hours, low pay, and a hostile work environment may be the main reasons for increasing dissatisfaction among the child labourers. This suggests the need for improving workplaces and support systems for these vulnerable children.

Bivariate analysis

This study sets out to find essential correlations between outcomes like education level and job satisfaction and variables like age, parental literacy, and working hours.

Table 16: Bivariate Findings

Variables Compared	Key Finding	Statistical Value
Age vs. Education Level	Older children more likely to drop out	$\chi^2 = 8.17$, $p < 0.05$
Parental Literacy vs. Child Education	Children with literate parents more likely to be in school	$\chi^2 = 11.34$, $p < 0.01$
Working Hours vs. Job Satisfaction	Longer hours linked to higher dissatisfaction	$\chi^2 = 13.22$, $p < 0.01$
Income vs. Duration of Work	Weak positive correlation (not significant)	$r = 0.19$, $p > 0.05$

The bivariate analysis shows significant relationships between the variables. The results show that older children are more likely to drop out of school ($\chi^2 = 8.17$, $p < 0.05$). This means that as children get older, they are more likely to drop out of school due to social and economic pressures. Similarly, children with literate parents are found to be more likely to enroll in school ($\chi^2 = 11.34$, $p < 0.01$). This shows the importance of parental education and indicates that it has a positive impact on children's education. It also confirms that parental education can help promote children's education by large and can contribute to reducing school dropout rates. In addition, job dissatisfaction among the child labourers was found to be positively related to long working hours ($\chi^2 = 13.22$, $p < 0.01$). This means that working more often increases the negative effects of workload. However, longer working hours do not always ensure higher income. The relationship between the hours worked and the income was weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.19$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

This study examined the socio-demographic variables including educational, and occupational realities of 147 child labourers working in Kathmandu Valley's unorganized sectors. When compared to a previous study on child labour, the results show both convergent and divergent trends. According to the previous study, a majority of child labourers (61.2%) were between the ages of 12 and 15. It was indicated that the older kids are more likely to join the workforce because of their perceived maturity and capacity to financially support their families (Danziger, 2010; Caspi et al., 1998; Maj et al., 2025).

In the South Asian context, a trend of children entering work early due to poverty has been observed in the same age group (Bussolo et al., 2024; Chand, 2018). The data showed that child labour is more prevalent among the marginalized groups, as confirmed by the ethnic composition of child labourers. According to the data, 57.14% of child labourers are tribal and 19.04% are the Dalits, supporting the claim that ethnic inequality in Nepal increases the risk of child labour (Gurung, 2012; Bennett et al., 2008; Pandey et al., 2025). The study showed that the majority of child labourers came from families with eight or more family members, while more than half of the child labourers had family members of five or more. According to the study, the majority of the child labourers came from families with eight or more members, while more than half came from families with five to seven members. This confirms that larger families are more likely to have children sent to work, as they face greater economic hardship (Edmonds, 2007; Edwards-Fapohunda & Adediji, 2024).

Furthermore, 51.7% of the child labourers had both illiterate parents. It highlighted that

the importance of parental education to the child's growth and development, as it helps keep children at school to prevent dropout from the school. This result is consistent with the previous studies that suggest that parental education helps improve children's academic performance (Shrestha, 2015; UNESCO, 2022; Xu et al., 2024).

This study's findings regarding the educational attainment of the child labourers were especially concerned. More than four-fifth (81.6%) of the child labourers had dropped out of school, despite the fact that nearly one fifth (18.4%) of the them were currently enrolled in school. The main reasons for child labourers dropping out of school were poverty, parental neglect, and inadequate school infrastructure. Poverty forces the children to participate in the family's livelihood. Lack of parental attention hinders their studies, and lack of school infrastructure makes it difficult to continue their studies. These reasons are also consistent with some previous studies (Cardoso & Verner, 2006; Adeagbo & Mosobalaje, 2023; Nwoke & Cochrane, 2024). The majority of the child labourers who dropped out their study due to child labour, had only completed primary education. This is consistent with the results of the National Child Labour Survey of Nepal, which shows that the educational level of the child labours is often low (Acharya et al., 2025; Atteraya et al., 2018).

Even so, there were many different reasons why the children dropped out of school. These include "the child's personal desire to work rather than studying" and "parents sending their children to work to earn money instead of sending them to school," reflecting a number of mixed factors. Many of the child labourers were found spending more than 12 hours a day doing physical

work such as cooking and washing dishes, which negatively affected their health, mental health, education, and social development. These challenges were even more acute in the informal and hospitality sectors. These results are consistent with the previous studies. Those studies have shown that the child labours in the informal and hospitality sectors often work long hours. This increases physical fatigue and occupational hazards. Therefore, the challenging and risky aspects of child labour are clearly visible from the previous studies too (Shoron, 2025; Zafar et al., 2025). The health problems experienced by the child labours, such as sore hands, cracked skin, and throat infections, highlight the importance of occupational safety measures. Such kind of safety measures are often not available in informal work environments. This increases the health risks of the child labourers and poses challenges to the safety and sustainability of work (Bhattacharjee et al., 2025; Nana-Onto, 2016).

It is interesting to note that income levels varied, and many individuals were found to earn more than 15,000 per month. Although this number may seem high, no clear relationship was found between income and duration of employment ($r = 0.19$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that higher wages are not always associated with longer-term stability or higher living standards. This finding may be a reflection of the exploitative nature of informal labour markets and deviates from the notion that longer employment duration equates to higher compensation (Kisegn & Tefera, 2025; Kingdom et al., 2006; Leigh, 2010). The bivariate analysis also found significant associations: children with literate parents were more likely to be enrolled in school ($\chi^2 = 11.34$, $p < 0.01$), and older children were more likely to drop out ($\chi^2 = 8.17$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, job dissatisfaction was higher among those who worked more than 12 hours per day ($\chi^2 = 13.22$, $p < 0.01$). The

data indicated how various factors such as age, parental education, and workload interact in the educational and emotional experiences of the child labours. Although many of the results are consistent with the previous research, this study also provides specific and unique insights into urban child labour in the transport and hospitality industries in Nepal. For instance, the previous studies also showed that the child labours sometimes felt happy with their relationships with peers or increased autonomy. However, this study found a high percentage of children (61.2%) expressing dissatisfaction with their work, which is a different result (Marjerison et al., 2025; Washington et al., 2009; Heinrich, 2014). More research is necessary to fully understand this urban-rural contrast.

Conclusion

As this study has found, poverty, social exclusion and illiteracy are the main factors that fuel child labour in Kathmandu Valley. Large families, illiterate households and children from disadvantaged groups are mostly engaged in child labour. Most children work for long hours every day, which leads to various health problems and also leads to dissatisfaction with the work place. Many children drop out of school due to the parents' illiteracy and economic stress, these are the major barriers to education that the government should address. Some children earn relatively more, which is an indicator of exploitative labour practices, and may not always be in a good working condition for them. The education of the children and the literacy of their parents are integral parts, allowing for the full education of their children by understanding the importance of education. In general, the persistence of child labour can be attributed to interrelated socio-economic factors. Addressing these factors requires comprehensive policies

that address poverty, expand educational opportunities, strengthen child protection laws, and guarantee safe working conditions. Coordination between social welfare, labour, and the education system is essential for sustainable change.

Author Contributions

MN, a student at Tribhuvan University and the principal author of this paper, was primarily responsible for the fieldwork, data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting. SP, the corresponding author, provided academic guidance, monitored the research process, contributed to data analysis, and finalized the manuscript for publication.

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