



**International Labour Organization
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

**Investigating the Worst Forms of Child Labour No. 4
Nepal
Situation of Child Ragpickers:
A Rapid Assessment**

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Preface

Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist, but they are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are all defined as Worst Forms of Child Labour. Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and immediate action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, Paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data, and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true of the worst forms of child labour, which by their very nature are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.

Against this background the ILO, through IPEC/SIMPOC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour/Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) has carried out 38 rapid assessments of the worst forms of child labour in 19 countries and one border area. The investigations have been made using a new rapid assessment methodology on child labour, elaborated jointly by the ILO and UNICEF¹. The programme was funded by the United States Department of Labor.

The investigations on the worst forms of child labour have explored very sensitive areas including illegal, criminal or immoral activities. The forms of child labour and research locations were carefully chosen by IPEC staff in consultation with IPEC partners. The rapid assessment investigations focused on the following categories of worst forms of child labour: children in bondage; child domestic workers; child soldiers; child trafficking; drug trafficking; hazardous work in commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, mining and the urban environment; sexual exploitation; and working street children.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed, through their individual and collective efforts, to the realisation of this report I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

I am sure that the wealth of information contained in this series of reports on the situation of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour around the world will contribute to a deeper understanding and allow us to more clearly focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners to tackle the problem on the ground.



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¹ Investigating Child Labour: Guidelines for Rapid Assessment - A Field Manual, January 2000, a draft to be finalized further to field tests, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/simpoc/guides/index.htm>

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This study, *Situation of Child Ragpickers in Nepal: A Rapid Assessment*, was undertaken during a period of three months, from late December 2000 through February 2001. It has closely followed the Rapid Assessment methodology prepared by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF.

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This study was a rare opportunity to work with the ILO towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour in Nepal. It also provided the whole research team with a good learning experience about this worst form of child labour.

Dr. Bal Kumar KC
Project Director

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Abbreviations

CAR-NWG	Children-at-Risk Network Group
CCC	Children Contact Centre
CDPS	Central Department of Population Studies, TU
CDS	Child Development Society
CONCERN	Children Concern for Environment
CPC	Child Protection Centre
CWIN	Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre
CWS	Child Welfare Society
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
ESP	Education Support Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GFONT	General Federation of the Nepalese Trade Unions
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
HMG	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organizations
INSEC	Informal Service Centre
IPEC	International Programmes on the Elimination of Child Labour
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NTUC	Nepal Trade Union Congress
RA	Rapid Assessment
SAFE	Social Awareness for Education
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TBP	Time Bound Programme
UBS	Urban Basic Services
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Education Programme
UN CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children
UNDP	United Nations Development Project
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UOSP	Urban Out of School Programme
UPCA	Underprivileged Children's Association

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Executive Summary

Background

The exploitative practice of child labour has come to be recognized as a major socio-economic problem. Child labour jeopardizes children's potential to become productive adults, robbing them of their health, their education and their prospects for a better future. It is an affront to the principles of social justice, child rights and to the protection of human rights. Children are among the most neglected, abused and exploited segments of the population, exposed to such worst forms of labour as ragpicking. In Nepal, child work in general – and child labour in particular – is a common phenomenon. An estimated 42 per cent of the total population of children from five to 14 years old are economically active (Suwal et al., 1997).

The need to restrict and eradicate the most intolerable forms of child labour has become an essential element of a national development strategy to achieve sustainable growth and protect human rights. His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) has repeatedly expressed its commitment to eliminating the worst forms of child labour, and the government is currently in the process of ratifying the new International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, No. 182.

This Rapid Assessment aims to gather information on the hazardous conditions facing children who work as ragpickers, known as *Khate* in Nepalese slang, and the manner in which these children are exploited. With the advent of recycling practices, ragpickers have become part of the growing population of street children in urban areas of Nepal. This study is intended to provide details on the nature, processes, and problems of child ragpicking, including the perceptions and behaviours of these children towards education, work and society. Family backgrounds and consequences of this worst form of child labour are examined as well. The study's findings will serve to assist future action programmes as well as to provide much needed background information. Additionally, recommendations based on the findings are offered.

This study is based on the Rapid Assessment (RA) methodology developed by the International Labour Organization/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Rapid Assessment combines both quantitative and qualitative data gathering tools, and is aimed at obtaining in-depth knowledge of a given phenomenon within only three months. Primary information consists of both quantitative and qualitative data that has been generated through interviews and field surveys, with an emphasis on qualitative data that may shed light on the plight of children working as ragpickers in Nepal. Secondary information was obtained from the limited existing studies. It should be noted that most prior studies on this topic were developed in the broader context of street children, not ragpickers specifically, and were not based on scientific methods.

What is ragpicking?

The term ragpicker currently refers to people who collect rags or recyclable materials that can

be sold for money. Ragpicking entails the sorting, collecting and selling of these various waste materials that can be found at dumpsites, riverbanks, street corners, or in residential areas, and consist primarily of plastics, bottles, cardboard, tin, aluminium, iron, brass, and copper. Plastic, tin and aluminium products are heavily sought after while paper goods rank low on the list. This is because ragpickers get paid according to the quality of the materials they sell to junkyards and garbage collection centres. As the market for recyclable materials has increased, many street children have turned to ragpicking as a means of survival. Based on this study it is estimated that there are 3,965 children engaged in ragpicking in the various urban centres of Nepal, with the highest concentrations located in Kathmandu Valley and Dharan. This study interviewed a total of 300 ragpickers: 264 boys and 36 girls.

Characteristics of ragpickers

Most children who work as ragpickers come from rural areas, specifically from hill and mountain regions. A disproportionate number of ragpickers are from the Dalit, Tamang and Magar ethnic groups, indicating that children from these groups are more prone to resort to ragpicking than children from other groups. More boys than girls engage in ragpicking, and the majority of boys live on the street whereas almost all the girls reported that they were living in rented or family homes. The school dropout rate amongst ragpickers is high, though the children reported that they would attend school if the financial support were available.

The average age of a ragpicker is 12. Literacy rates of ragpickers are comparable to national averages, with the majority literate, and boys more literate than girls overall. Ragpickers usually come from poor rural families involved in non-agricultural, low-paying occupations. Family size and structure does not seem to directly influence the incidence of ragpicking among children overall, and most of the ragpickers come from families who own a home.

Conditions of ragpicking

Ragpickers live from day to day, usually spending all the money they earn in a day, and are still often left without enough money to feed themselves. This draws the children to either borrow money from junkyards, which puts them in a bonded labour situation, or causes them to resort to petty crime such as begging, theft, or other criminal activities. Ragpickers are most likely to go hungry during the rainy season when materials are wet and dirty and collecting them is difficult due to the rain and mud. Still, 92% of the children interviewed reported to work year-round. In addition to experiencing hunger, it is common for ragpickers to fall sick due to exposure to contaminants or bacteria, the cold, and wounds inflicted by sharp glass or metal objects.

The best hours to work are in the mornings and evenings when most people dispose of their garbage, but many ragpickers work for six hours per day in their effort to survive. Earnings fluctuate between NRs. 50 to 300 per day¹. A majority of ragpickers spend their money on smoking, alcohol, and drugs in addition to food. They are highly vulnerable to drugs as they are likely to be exposed to addicts and suppliers as well as to peer pressure. Ragpickers tend to be territorial about their collection sites and as a result they are involved in gangs and/or exposed to gang resulting violence. Many of the children interviewed have been used in drug peddling and commercial sex as middlemen, or been sexually abused. They are thus vulnerable

¹ US \$1.00 = NR 74,65 (August 2001)

to HIV/AIDS.

Pathways and consequences

The majority of ragpickers migrate from poor, rural and landless homes to urban areas. Many of them leave illiterate single parent or stepparent families behind them and are attracted by the prospects of jobs and facilities. Some children migrate with their families or for a specific job and end up ragpicking when other options do not work out.

Ragpickers interact relatively positively with other street children and NGOs, but face negative interactions with the police, civil society, junkyard owners and criminal gangs. They live in a world that teaches them violence and abuse and exposes them to unhealthy behaviours and lifestyles.

Ragpickers and the future

No institution has yet addressed the specific needs of ragpickers, and in terms of child labour in general, the many acts and policies that have been introduced to address the issue have had little impact so far. Social awareness of ragpickers needs to be raised and action plans to help develop the children's sense of place and belonging in society must be implemented. The children need a means of reintegration to society; skill development and vocational training in poor rural areas may be one way of addressing this. NGOs and the government need to work closely together to fully understand the circumstances surrounding ragpicking and to design effective programmes.

The following recommendations, broken into two categories, preventative and protective, are priorities for action to start creating change in the lives of children working as ragpickers, and to obstruct the paths leading children into this worst form of child labour.

Recommendations

Preventive and protective measures are equally important to address the situation of child ragpickers. A preventive approach would discourage children from leaving home for street life, which should be focussed *at the place of origin*. A protective approach would prevent the children, who are already on the street, or *at the destination*, from engaging in the worst forms of child labour. The following recommendations are ordered by priority.

Preventive Approaches

- i. **Public Awareness:** Due to the extreme mobility of the target group, and to the fact that ragpickers originate from all areas of Nepal, strategies for the prevention of ragpicking must be centred around large-scale awareness campaigns on the dangers, causes and nature of child ragpicking. People should be made aware of children's rights. This can be achieved through advocacy with an effective information, education, and communication (IEC) programme.
- ii. **Institutional Mechanisms:** The hazardous occupation of ragpicking is not likely to be eliminated without an efficient system for solid waste management in urban areas of Nepal. There is a need to strengthen the solid waste management system of Kathmandu, and

support the establishment of sustainable community based waste management schemes.

- iii. **Education:** Education should be compulsory, relevant, meaningful, and universal to all. The content of education should be changed so that it encourages children to study and drop out rates are minimised. The focus should be on vocational and skill-oriented training. Pertinent patterns of education adapted to local needs should be introduced at the regional level.
- iv. **Income Generating Programmes:** Income generating programmes should be launched for those families who are unable to send their children to school as an alternative to making their children work.

Protective Approaches

- i. **Sensitised Law Enforcement:** Law-enforcing agencies are not sensitised to children's rights and the protection of children working in risky conditions. There is a wide range of complaints against government agencies regarding the denial of children's rights when handling their cases in justice. There should be a child-friendly justice system, and people involved in such areas should be trained and sensitised to the rights of children. Priority should be given to making the street a safer place for ragpickers and to reducing the incidence of reported police brutality against ragpickers. This can be achieved by training and sensitising police on child rights and on how to become part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.
- ii. **Counselling and Socialisation:** Counselling is the most important and basic requirement for children who have left home, who have no home and no parents, or who do not want to return home. Socialisation is important to minimise the gap between those children who generally feel hated by society, and the people living in the society who do not consider them as social elements. Common rooms or gathering locales are required to provide counselling and socialisation services in the areas where child ragpickers are prevalent. Drop-in centres for child ragpickers, where they may shower, keep personal belongings safe and where there will be access to basic health facilities are important. A related function of such drop-in centres would be to keep track of child ragpickers in the municipalities and to offer counseling on a demand-driven basis. In addition, former ragpickers should be employed as staff and community monitors in the drop-in centre.
- iii. **Issue of Citizenship:** Most child ragpickers, especially those who have no family contact at their place of origin, do not have their citizenship papers which are necessary to obtain formal work in Nepal. The government should facilitate the procurement of citizenship for these children.
- iv. **Hotline, Helpline Services:** In order to provide a range of services to children working as ragpickers, a hotline or helpline service, such as the CWIN Helpline (271000) in Kathmandu, should be arranged by the government. HMG should provide free-call telephone service to credible NGOs to undertake emergency support programmes for the benefit of these children. There are instances of such free-call services in different countries such as India, the Philippines, and Brazil.
- v. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** Rehabilitation is necessary for all child ragpickers so that they can find their place into society. Whenever possible, the children who still have parents willing to take them back should be reintegrated into their families. A part of the rehabilitation process should be to provide vocational or entrepreneurship training to

former child ragpickers. Due to the high cost of running such centers these could be supported on the basis of private sector co-funding.

- vi. **Informal and Vocational Education:** Informal education has proven to be an effective way to increase literacy among younger children. Once literate, they should be given vocational training, which would allow them to earn a living. Experience shows that formal education is not appropriate for these children as the time required to obtain a degree is too limiting, and the job prospects in the formal sector are low. By contrast, vocational training can provide them with valuable skills which they can put to immediate use if the training is adapted to the availability of jobs in the market. There must be some support for employment opportunities for the skilled workers generated by the vocational education.
- vii. **Sustainable Fund Generation:** Funds can be generated by individuals and trusts to support a child's development. This fund should be used for the children's educational expenses. As an example, UPCA in Dharan has been supporting education expenses for some children who are interested and intelligent but cannot afford schooling. Children of Ex-British-Gurkhas living in Hong Kong and Brunei have generated the funds to allow this.
- viii. **Public Awareness:** One of the main recurring problems among child ragpickers is marginalisation by society, which makes their reintegration even more challenging. It is therefore necessary to establish an environment in which society recognises these children as human beings, which can be accomplished through public awareness programmes focussing on child rights and development.
- ix. **Dialogue with Employers:** Junkyard owners should also be involved in the battle against child ragpicking. Attempts to work with the employers of ragpickers should center on dialogue and on the need to find solutions, possibly through joint research.
- x. **Effective Programming by Donor Agencies:** Donor agencies should have an indiscriminate monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate NGOs' work in the area. This would allow NGOs to receive funds based on the genuineness and effectiveness of their programmes rather than their relationship with the donor agencies. In addition, programme duplication can be eliminated by better co-ordination among donor agencies. This would also help to minimise costs and maximise the effectiveness of the programmes.

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background

Nepal, a landlocked Himalayan Kingdom with a population of 23 million people, is considered one of the least developed countries in the world. It has been striving to accelerate the pace of its socio-economic development within the framework of a multiparty parliamentary system adopted since 1990.

Nepal ranks 144th in the Human Development Index, with a per capita income around US\$ 210, and forty-two percent of the population estimated to live below the poverty line (UNDP, 2000). Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and underemployment, poor health, sluggish economic growth and agrarian economy characterise the Nepalese society. As a consequence of this situation, child labour is widespread, and a major socio-economic problem. Such practice has been recognised as jeopardising children's potential to become productive adults, by precluding them from health, education and other basic rights.

Though many cultures regard children as the future architects and backbone of their country, the situation is different in Nepal, due mostly to these socio-economical conditions. Children are often neglected, abused and exploited, and exposed to the worst forms of labour such as trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation and physically exerting or dangerous work.

The volume of research on children's work and child labour has grown considerably since 1990, much of it sponsored by non-government organizations (NGO). The information produced has, however, sometimes been influenced by biases, especially in favour of urban children working on the streets (Boyden et al., 1998).

Children working on the street are clearly a much more visible phenomenon in Nepal than many other forms of child labour; yet there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the situation of these children, especially in relation to those who form the largest group on the streets of Nepal – the ragpickers.

Ragpickers, known as *Khate* in Nepali slang, have recently become part of the growing population of street children with the advent of recycling practices. So far, there are very few studies carried out on ragpicking, and they are not based on scientific methods. Among the studies, a majority of them were conducted by the Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN)². Individuals conducted others³, and one was done by Child Welfare Society (CWS)⁴.

² CWIN (1989) published a research synopsis "Young Ragpickers in Kathmandu" in a newsletter, Voice of Child Workers, based on a survey of 34 children in Kathmandu in 1989. In 1990, CWIN published another article "Thieving: An Increasing Trend Among Young Ragpickers" in the same newsletter, exposing three faces of the ragpickers: the ragpicker, the beggar, and the thief (CWIN, 1990a). In the same year, CWIN published "Lost Childhood" based on survey research of 100 street children of Kathmandu (CWIN, 1990b).

³ Dhital (1991) published a Nepali article based on a survey of 500 street children. Pradhan (1993) also published a feature article "Khate: The Street Survivors" focussing on the street children's problems and prospects based on a survey study of 908 street children registered in the CWIN common room.

⁴ In 1996, another NGO called Child Welfare Society (CWS) published a research report "Situation Analysis of Street Children in Nepal" in collaboration with UNICEF, based on a survey of 538 street children in Nepal.

Many of these studies mention that the majority of street children are involved in ragpicking. Dhital (1991) found 70 percent and Pradhan (1993) 64 percent of street children interviewed to be in this occupation, whereas CWS (1996) reported only 51 percent of the research group to be involved in ragpicking. Among the studies undertaken, only two have focussed specifically on ragpickers, while the others were targeted more broadly at street children. Most of these studies seem to have picked their research cases purposively, and thus may not be representative of the entire country's situation. In addition, these studies are based on limited information and focus mostly on the nature and problems of ragpickers and street children. Details about the processes and consequences of ragpicking are thus also missing.

1.2 Objectives

In contrast to previous research on child ragpicking in Nepal, this study is intended to bring out detailed information on the nature, processes, and problems of child ragpicking in Nepal. It attempts to highlight the perceptions and behaviour of these children towards education, work and society. Special focus is given to the family backgrounds from which ragpickers originate, as well as the consequences of ragpicking in order to identify groups more likely to be involved in these activities.

In order to understand the work and lives of child ragpickers, and to support ILO/IPEC in the implementation of a Time Bound Programme (TBP) on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, the present Rapid Assessment (RA) research aims to fulfil the following specific objectives:

- to identify the socio-economic background of ragpickers;
- to assess the nature and magnitude of the problem of ragpickers and push and pull factors related to this work;
- to examine the working conditions and perceptions of ragpickers towards work and education;
- to assess the institutional framework within which ragpickers exist; and
- to recommend solutions and possible alternatives for ragpickers.

1.3 Nepalese Context

Most of the urban centres of Nepal have street children. CWIN (1989) estimated that more than 300 child ragpickers live and work in Kathmandu City, 60 percent being migrants and about 65 percent living away from home and parents. Among the ragpickers, an overwhelming majority are found to be boys (CWIN, 1989; CWS, 1996), and the average age has been estimated at 11.7 years (CWIN, 1989).

The nature of the ragpickers' work is multiple-faceted, and has been divided into three phases: the ragpicker, the beggar, and the thief (CWIN 1990a). When ragpickers fail to collect rags or feel too lazy to work they resort to alternatives such as pick-pocketing or stealing metal scraps like kitchen utensils – metal plates, aluminium water vessels, iron bars, brass and copper vessels, etc. – which can be sold for money. The new and less experienced ragpickers tend to practice begging as an alternative.

According to previous research, ragpickers mostly originate from the surrounding districts of

Kathmandu valley and belong to Brahmin/Chhetri and Mongoloid ethnic groups (Pradhan, 1993). They are usually from families with step-or single-parents, or are orphans (CWS, 1996), though this research's findings may differ on these points. Several come from slums and squats along riverbanks (Dhital, 1991), although some originate from rural villages where poverty and precarious livelihood are common.

Rural-urban migration, hardship in rural life, large families, and an increasing occurrence of family problems are reportedly among the leading causes behind the increasing number of street children in urban areas. Other reasons may include an attraction towards urban life due to the accessibility of a large development infrastructure, perceived opportunities, and modern facilities. Yet survival on the street is a daily struggle for these children.

CWIN does report that a number of children quote poverty and death of bread earners in the family as the main reason for leaving home (CWIN, 1989), while mistreatment by stepparents and the inability to attend school were among the other reasons. They conclude that the children leave home in search of a better life in the city, wanting to avoid heavy work at home. Similarly, Dhital (1991) noted that the main reasons for leaving home were poverty, lack of schooling, and mistreatment by stepmothers. CWS (1996) provides more insight, stating that lack of love, care and parental guidance, as well as violence in the family were among the main reasons for children to leave their homes. Apparently, significant changes in the family structure caused by death, remarriage or polygamy may trigger situations that push children out of their homes. In addition, peer influence, parent's expectations, or the desire to see the city have brought rural children to urban centres where, after usually being exploited in various jobs, they end up as street children and ragpickers.

Previous research also determines that the critical problems affecting child ragpickers emerge from an unhealthy environment, insecurity, illiteracy, exploitation, and lack of alternative work, especially during the rainy season (CWIN, 1989). Most of the children in the CWIN study were found to have poor health, some with acute or chronic tuberculosis, and many had physical injuries like cuts, scratches or burns, skin diseases like scabies, or intestinal diseases (CWIN 1990b). Apart from the serious risks of dog bites, ragpickers are more likely to be exposed to criminal activities or become victims of criminal gangs. In fact, CWIN (1990a) found about 90 percent of ragpickers to have experienced arrest and detention into police custody. In detention centres, they are mixed with other criminals, are often beaten and tortured or exposed to abuse by other criminals. Pradhan (1993) research also relates cases of children involved in minor crimes like pick-pocketing, stealing, drug peddling and prostitution, and described their relationship with the police to be very negative. They also found that older street boys and criminal gangs used street children in criminal activities.

Although the work and lives of street children are thereby described in some detail in previous reports, the universe of ragpickers remains largely unexplored. Bearing in mind their working conditions, the hazards they face, and the trigger factors driving these children to the street, this report shall present more details into these factors based on findings of the rapid assessment on child ragpickers conducted in major urban areas of Nepal.

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 The Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour

This rapid assessment is based on the definitions set out in the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999, No. 182. The convention provides a new framework to analyse child labour and can be applied to ragpickers as it targets those forms of children's work considered to be the most exploitative and intolerable under all circumstances. As per Article 3, the worst forms of child labour include:

- Slavery or practices similar to slavery including debt bondage, sale of children, serfdom, and forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts
- The use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution or for pornography
- The use of children for illicit activities – particularly within the drug trade
- Work that is likely to endanger the health, safety, or morals of children

The accompanying Recommendation No 190 gives special attention to cases of the worst forms of child labour where children are exposed to:

- physical, psychological or sexual abuse
- work underground, under water, at dangerous heights, confined spaces
- work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools
- manual handling or transport of heavy loads
- an unhealthy environment exposing workers to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or temperatures, noise levels or vibration damaging to health
- work under difficult circumstances, including long hours, or during the night
- unreasonable confinement on the employer's premises

All children under age 18 years working in such environments are covered by the convention, whether or not the labourer is paid.

1.4.2 Child Ragpickers as One of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

According to UNICEF, ragpicking is one of the worst forms of child labour, and falls under the street children category (UNICEF, 1997:40). The concept of street children and the definition of the term *ragpickers* appear to have undergone modifications over time. Initially, ragpickers were considered those children who literally work and live in the street, known as *children on the street*. Today, the denotation of ragpickers has been extended to include those working in the street but living with their families in homes, slums, squats, etc., known as *children of the street*. This study includes both cases, whether they belong to the “of the street” or “on the street” category. Ragpickers, also known as 'garbage pickers,' live on the street, in slums or shanty areas, and he/she makes a living from sorting, collecting, and selling waste metal, rags, containers to the local junkyards or garbage collection centres (CWIN, 1989:13).

Past studies indicate that, while none of the ragpickers were found to be malnourished (CWIN, 1992), they had very poor health due to the consumption of unhygienic food and to working in an unhealthy, polluted environment. They are particularly vulnerable during the rainy season, when most of them suffer from diarrhoea and scabies, and in winter when they

suffer from colds (CWIN, 1989). A number of cases of burn accidents that occurred while the children were attempting to make themselves warm during cold nights in the street, were recorded at the CWIN Socialisation Centre, popularly known as the common room.

The nature of the ragpickers' work, collecting rags from the garbage dumps and waste bins, is of course hazardous. They are highly exposed to tetanus and other infections caused by cuts from sharp metal pieces, broken glass, and other materials. The risk of falling ill is very high since they operate in unhygienic, polluted areas, and consume dirty or unhealthy food and water (CWIN, 1989). Besides the physical exertion and risks associated with the collection of rags, which they usually perform from early morning to late evening, such activities do not allow time conducive to recreational activities and/or proper psychological and physical development. These children are generally deprived of love and education, considered two essential elements in the development of children, and are at high risk of being exploited by others, especially people running junkyards and adult bandits that exploit and/or abuse them criminally or sexually.

Based on the assessment of previous studies on the situation of street children and ragpicking, ragpickers can clearly be identified as being subject to one of the worst forms of child labour. The following study therefore intends to explore the situation more comprehensively to fully describe the nature and extent of the issue.

Chapter II

Methodology

2.1 Rapid Assessment

Rapid assessment (RA) is a methodology developed by ILO/UNICEF (2000) to bring out an understanding of a particular social phenomenon and its context, usually for the purpose of designing an intervention strategy. In short, RA is a combination of a broad range of qualitative and quantitative survey tools, which can be adapted to local conditions as required when researching the often hidden and invisible aspects of the worst forms of child labour.

The present study attempts to determine the situation of child ragpickers and the factors that lead them to a life on the street, and is based on fieldwork undertaken in six urban sites in Nepal. The research includes purposive sampling methods and simple qualitative methods of informal interviews, and was carried out over a one-month period.

A principal limitation of RA findings is that it cannot easily be generalised to cover a larger portion of the population. Rapid assessment data represents a smaller, more targeted scale of reality and delivers more qualitative than quantitative information generated by in-depth research in small-scale areas.

2.2 Methods Adopted for This Study

The field research was conducted in six urban sites covering both the Hill and Tarai regions of Nepal, namely Kathmandu Valley Cities (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur), Pokhara, Butwal, Bharatpur, Dharan, and Biratnagar (Map 1). One month was allocated to conduct the field research, and all possible resources were mobilised to gather as much information as possible in the limited amount of time.

Research sites were selected based on prior information available on the prevalence of ragpickers, and respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. A research team consisting of six members conducted the investigations at all sites, using a variety of tools to collect both qualitative and quantitative information. Structured interviews were conducted to generate quantitative information on the incidence and background characteristics of ragpickers (Appendix I). Additionally, key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), case histories, and observations were used to generate qualitative information for a better in-depth knowledge of the issue, and to support the quantitative data.

The research team used the network of CWIN in order to reach child ragpickers in the field sites. CWIN has maintained a good rapport with children and local-level NGOs involved with street children such as UPCA in Dharan, Narayanghat Youth Club in Bharatpur, and Child Contact Centre (CCC) in Butwal. This facilitated the research team's efforts to approach the target group.



Map 1: Location of Survey Sample Sites

2.3 Respondents

Two types of respondents were interviewed in the field research. At first, interviews were conducted with key informants, including persons working in related fields and familiar with the issue, NGO personnel, municipality members, police, junkyard owners, and other individuals with some knowledge of the situation. For subsequent structured interviews, FGD, and case histories, the respondents were children aged 5-17 years working as ragpickers who were identified during the field research.

A total of 300 structured interviews were conducted in those six sites (Kathmandu valley: 106; Pokhara: 41; Butwal: 30; Bharatpur: 41; Dharan: 47; and Biratnagar: 35). The snowball sampling technique⁵ was used to select respondents with whom to conduct the interviews. Additional qualitative information was collected during 25 key informant interviews, six FGD, 15 case histories, and 12 observations conducted at all sample sites.

2.4 Data Processing and Analysis

The qualitative information obtained during the interviews and discussions was collected using notes and tape recordings, which were subsequently transcribed. Using a pre-coded questionnaire, quantitative information obtained from the structured interviews was edited carefully. Data were logged using a System Data Format (SDF) and processed by SPSS software. Analysis of quantitative information consisted in producing simple frequency, cross, and mean tables as required, while qualitative information was analysed by categorising concerns and topics raised in interviews and producing relevant cases presented in text boxes.

⁵ The snowball sampling technique is widely used in social science research. This purposive method selects interview participants based on their availability and willingness to be interviewed.

2.5 Problems Encountered and Lessons Learned

The first problem the researchers encountered in the field was facing a rather negative perception carried by children and the general public towards government and non-government organizations. Specifically, a large number of children feel government officials and police are corrupt, and do not work for the people. Similarly, children expressed the concern that NGOs exploit them by collecting money in their name but doing nothing for them. Children were therefore reluctant to be interviewed, especially in Bharatpur and Butwal, having often faced similar situations, and feeling that personnel from “NGOs/INGOs come to interview us and speak in promising words of a bright future, but never return, and do nothing for us.” Similarly, they expressed a feeling of humiliation when “journalists interview us and publish our photographs in newspapers and magazines.”

The common feeling among them seemed to be that people came to interview them under false pretences for “*Paisa Pachaunu*” (to digest money). Such notions in the minds of respondents made it difficult to build the rapport required for the interviews, and to carry them out smoothly. Fortunately, CWIN's⁶ network was very helpful in improving the situation and facilitating the work of the research team.

On the other hand, it was apparent that child ragpickers have great expectations in the ability of the government and the NGOs to help them. Many key informants and staff at the local NGOs raised this as a serious problem, concerned that some organizations might be deceiving the children to serve the research. Consequently, training of enumerators and field personnel included a thorough examination of the issues of ethics and informed consent when working with children, and utmost care was taken in the interviews to avoid raising unfounded expectations.

Another challenge faced was finding an appropriate time and location to interview ragpickers as most of their day is spent working, and any time away from their work might have a serious impact on their subsistence. The research team therefore had to consider this and changed its approach in order to be able to meet ragpickers at their usual gathering places, such as junkyards and local NGO offices.

Gathering reliable information was also complicated by the nature of the respondents themselves. Due to their lifestyle and the necessity to deal with daily hardships, child ragpickers tend to cope by not telling the truth. Much time was therefore devoted to building a good rapport with each respondent to minimise the potential of being given false information.

2.6 Methodological Revisions in the Context of This Study

As the study progressed, researchers found that the use of key informant interviews proved to be relatively more effective than other forms of information gathering, as these individuals possess comprehensive knowledge of the lifestyles of ragpickers due to their extensive work and experience in that field. It was also observed that focus group discussions were difficult to conduct among younger children because the time allocated did not allow researchers to gain their confidence and therefore solicit views and opinions. However, focus groups tended to be

⁶ CWIN has a good network of local NGOs working in the field of child rights, which are present throughout the survey sites. It seems all children ragpickers *of the street* know about CWIN, and the research team also found UPCA in Dharan is popular amongst children ragpickers at the local level.

more conducive amongst older children who seemed more willing to share some information in that context. For example, many children who had denied using drugs during the structured interview confessed to doing so in the focus group sessions.

The researchers found that in general, precautions must be taken in interpreting some of the information obtained from structured interviews. Care should be taken in explaining such aspects as perception and attitudes. Use of drugs, family relationships, attitudes toward education, and future hopes are response areas often subject to lying, and therefore should not be included in structured questionnaires. Another finding is that the structured interview should be kept short and straightforward in order to ease the process of cross-checking information for reliability.

Chapter III

Characteristics of Child Ragpickers

This chapter deals with the socio-economic characteristics of ragpickers enumerated in the survey to establish an understanding of the context within which ragpickers exist. Based on the information available, the volume of ragpickers in the country is estimated first, then their characteristics such as origin, age and sex composition, literacy rate, family size and composition, and economic status are outlined.

3.1 Estimates of Child Ragpickers

Five questions were used in the interviews to measure the magnitude of the ragpicker phenomenon. The first two questions identified whether they worked individually or in a group, and the size of the group they belonged to. The remaining questions were related to the information they might have about other groups working as ragpickers.

Based on the information gathered, we multiplied the number of groups reported to be working as ragpickers and the average size of each group to establish the number of ragpickers working in each urban centre, for a total of 2,969 children. Besides these, 222 groups were interviewed, each of an average size of four children, adding 888 children to the total. Finally, an additional 78 individual ragpickers were identified, therefore, evaluating the total number of child ragpickers in the country at 3,965.

According to these findings, the highest concentration of child ragpickers is found to occur in the two urban centres of Kathmandu valley and Dharan (Table 3.1). The third highest incidence, by less than half, is reportedly in Pokhara.

Two limitations in the procedure to estimate the total number of ragpickers in the country can be identified. First, there is a high probability of duplication in the number of groups identified by respondents, which is virtually impossible to evaluate. Second, there is a limitation in the coverage of the information gathered, as only seven major urban sites were considered for the purposes of this study, although new urban centres are also likely to have a number of rag pickers. However, while the first limitation inflates the incidence, the latter potentially depreciates it, therefore it is safe to assume that these two factors might cancel each other out. This means the total estimated number of child ragpickers of 3,695 can be considered fairly accurate.

Table 3.1: Estimates of Child Ragpickers

Sample Site	Source	Number
Kathmandu	Estimate from survey data	960
Valley	CWIN: Contact Center, Bus Park	1,000
Pokhara	Estimate from survey data	392
	Research: CWIN	125
	UBS, Pokhara Municipality	150
Butwal	Estimate from survey data	248
	Child Contact Center, survey	250
Bharatpur	Estimate from survey data	261
	Narayanghat Youth Club	60
	Adult ragpickers	70
Biratnagar	Estimate from survey data	315
	Child Protection Center	250
Dharan	Estimate from survey data	861
	UPCA	300
	Police	100
Total	Estimate for survey sites	2,969
	Estimate for Total Nepal	3,965

Note: UBS – Urban Basic Services (a section of Municipality);

3.2 Place of Origin of Ragpickers

Out of 300 child ragpickers interviewed, 192 respondents (64%) indicated they migrated from different parts of Nepal (Table 3.2), while the remaining children were natives of the urban centre where they are currently working. Among the migrant children, the highest proportion was found to originate from hill/mountain regions (47%). A considerable proportion of migrant child ragpickers, mainly concentrated in the Kathmandu valley, originated from India (16%) and are living and working as ragpickers with other family members⁷.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Ragpickers by Origin

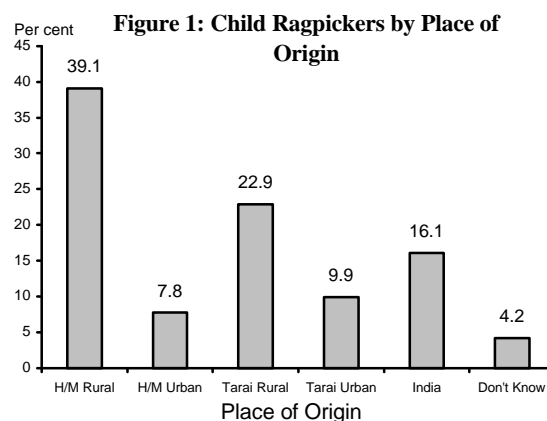
Place of Origin	Boys	Girls	Total	N
Hill/Mountain	48.0	30.8	46.9	90
Tarai	33.5	23.1	32.8	63
India ¹	14.5	38.5	16.1	31
Don't Know	3.9	7.7	4.2	8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	192
Total N	179	13	192	

The distribution of boys and girls from either hill or Tarai regions seems consistent, while there is a significantly higher proportion of girls than boys migrating from India involved in ragpicking. This may be explained by the fact that Indian boys are generally employed in alternative skilled work, such as workshops, small businesses, mechanical work or selling fruits and vegetables.

The next important factor to determine is whether ragpickers come from rural or urban areas. Figure 1 indicates that a majority of ragpickers originates from rural areas (77.8%), both in hill/mountain and Tarai regions⁸. Key informants believe that this phenomenon is caused by abject poverty, lack of job opportunities, and overall hardship in rural areas, in contrast to the prospect of job opportunities and perceived excitement of city life.

3.3 Access to Social Services at Place of Origin

The study attempted to draw a correlation between the lack of access to social services at the place of origin of ragpickers and the incidence of children migrating to urban centres and becoming ragpickers. The data was not collected amongst Indian migrant or native non-migrant children. Among the total native migrant respondents (153), most (95.4%) reported having access to schools at their place of origin, while the service least available to them was co-operatives (Table 3.3). This



⁷ Key informants report that many Indian ragpickers in Kathmandu both children and adult, have recently migrated, mostly from Bihar and Madras, and are gradually replacing native children. Due to language barriers and a certain bias on the part of the interviewers, who were focussing on native children, the proportion of Indian ragpickers surveyed does not reflect their actual occurrence.

⁸ Further information indicates that most children originating from rural areas come from regions with road access, rather than isolated villages. This may show that the factor of accessibility is to be considered as an additional influence in children's migration to urban centres.

raises further questions as to why these children would choose to go to the streets rather than go to school. Some key informants speculate it may be due to the precarious state of education in Nepal today, whereby teacher absenteeism, violence, and lack of relevant teaching materials are causing high drop out rates and reinforcing negative attitudes towards schooling among guardians.

3.4 Age, Sex, and Caste/Ethnicity

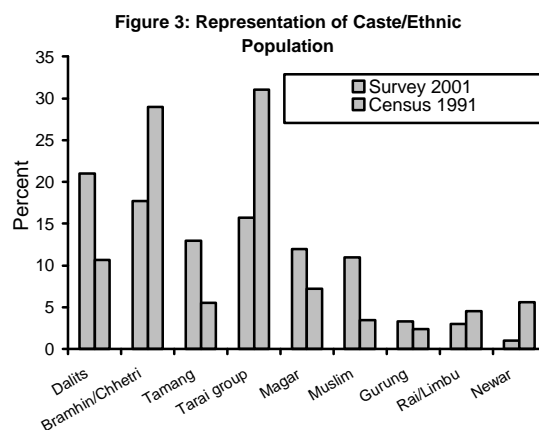
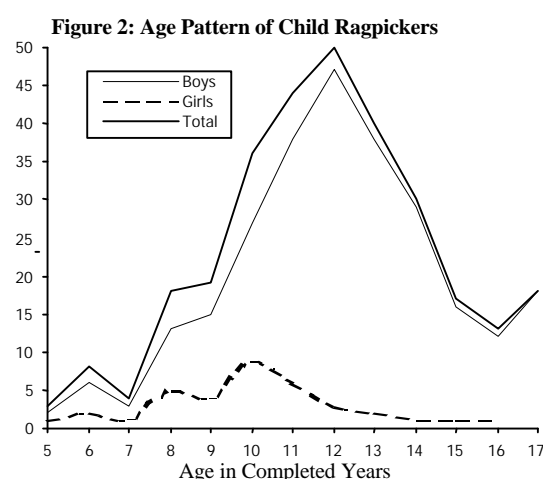
Out of 300 respondents, only 36 were girls, which indicates a very low incidence of ragpicking amongst girls. This may partly be explained by the fact that streets are not safe places for girls. It is also due to the fact that girls are often married at very low ages, and that mobility of women and girls in society at large is heavily restricted by social and cultural norms. The overwhelming majority of children interviewed (67%) fall into the 10-14 years age group, the mean age being 12 years for boys and 10 years for girls (Figure 2). All sample sites followed the same pattern of age distribution.

The largest portion of ragpickers in the study belongs to the Dalit ethnic group, (21%) considered low caste (untouchables) in the Hindu hierarchical system (Table 3.4), while Brahmins and Chhetris, considered high caste, come in second position, (17.7%). However, when compared to their distribution within society, the occurrence of ragpicking amongst Dalits is much higher than with Brahmins and Chhetris. This is also true of other ethnic groups such as Tamangs, Magars, and Muslims⁹, while the representation of Newar and Tarai groups is lower than their national distribution (Figure 3).

There is a common assumption that a majority of child ragpickers comes from lower-caste families, however, as stated earlier, the information generated in the study challenges this assumption. Though it can be verified that more children from disadvantaged groups go to the street for their survival, it is also observed that so-

Table 3.3: Basic Social Services at Origin

Basic Social Services	Rural	Urban	Total	N
School	94.1	100.0	95.4	146
Market service	59.7	100.0	68.6	105
Transportation	60.5	94.1	68.0	104
Health post	59.7	94.1	67.3	103
Electricity	38.7	91.2	50.3	77
Piped drinking water	37.0	91.2	49.0	75
Police station	34.5	88.2	46.4	71
Telephone	25.2	94.1	40.5	62
Post office	25.2	85.3	38.6	59
Agri. service center	13.4	79.4	28.1	43
Bank service	13.4	76.5	27.5	42
Cooperatives	10.9	76.5	25.5	39
N	119	34	153	



Source: Survey (2001); KC (1995:316).

⁹ It can be assumed, however, that most Muslim respondents are Indian rather than native children, in which case their distribution amongst ragpickers cannot be compared to the national model.

called “higher caste” children may end up as ragpickers.

The distribution of respondents belonging to specific ethnic groups in each sample site is generally consistent with the general concentration of these groups in that particular area. For example, a higher concentration of Dalit ragpickers was observed in Pokhara (25/41) and Dharan (13/47), where Dalits are generally more represented. Similarly, Tamang respondents tend to cluster more in the Kathmandu valley (23/106) area, which is also consistent with the concentration of this ethnic group in the surrounding districts of the valley. Other groups follow this trend, though a significant concentration of Tarai (38/80) and Magar (12/36) children in Kathmandu may indicate a broader migration trend.

Table 3.4: Number of Respondents by Age/sex, Caste/ethnicity, and Sample Sites

Age and Caste/ethnicity of Ragpickers	Sex		Total	Sample Site					
	Boys	Girls		Kath. Valley	Pokhara	Bharat pur	Butwal	Birat nagar	Dharan
Age group									
5-9	39	13	52	17	3	8	5	12	7
10-14	179	21	200	64	33	30	18	18	37
15-17	46	2	48	25	5	3	7	5	3
Caste/Ethnicity									
Dalits ¹	56	7	63	7	25	7	11		13
Bramhin/chhetri	50	3	53	27	4	11	6		5
Tamang	36	3	39	23	1	8			7
Tarai group	34	4	38	22	2	6		3	5
Magar	35	1	36	12	4	3	11		6
Muslim	19	14	33	1				32	
Gurung	9	1	10	2	2	3			3
Rai/Limbu	8	1	9	3					6
Choudhari/Dhimal	9		9	4	2	1	1		1
Newar	3		3	3					
Bhujel	2	1	3			2			1
Don't know	3	1	4	2	1		1		
Total	264	36	300	106	41	41	30	35	47

Note: 1. Dalits includes Kami, Damai, and Sarki.

As for girl ragpickers, most (14/36) came from the Muslim community in Biratnagar¹⁰. The second largest ethnic concentration among girls, by far, is from the Dalit group, with seven respondents out of the remaining 22.

3.5 Literacy of Child Ragpickers

About 49 percent of the children interviewed are literate, though the discrepancy between literate boys (52%) and girls (28%) is significant. (Table 3.5).

The rate of literacy increases with the age of

Table 3.5: Literacy Rate of Respondents

Background	Literate	Illiterate	N
Sex of Children			
Boys	51.9	48.1	264
Girls	27.8	72.2	36
Age group			
5-9	28.8	71.2	52
10-14	53.0	47.0	200
15-17	54.2	45.8	48
Ethnicity			
Brahmin/Chhetri	62.3	37.7	53
Dalits	47.6	52.4	63
Tamang	56.4	43.6	39
Magar	58.3	41.7	36
Other Hill Ethnic	56.0	44.0	25
Tarains	32.5	67.5	80
Don't Know			4
Total	49.0	51.0	300

Note: Other Hill Ethnic includes Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, and Bhujel.

¹⁰ Biratnagar is a border town with the Indian State of Bihar a

children, which is considered a natural trend. Among Brahmin and Chhetris, the literacy level is the highest of all (62.3%). Similarly, it ranges from 56 to 58 percent among Tamangs, Magars, and other hill ethnic groups, while it is considerably lower among Dalits (48%) and Tarai children (33%). Literacy rates among boy and girl ragpickers follows the national average, which may appear surprising, though some respondents and key informants believe NGO-run literacy programmes may have contributed to these results.

3.6 Family Size and Composition

The family setting is often regarded as a basic social institution within which a child is taught the fundamentals of society and life. However, various factors may hinder the healthy development of a child within the family circle. For example, the loss of a parent or the introduction of a stepparent can have a significant impact on the child, as Nepalese culture does not favour the adoption of step children, and many step parents may see these fruits of a previous marriage as a hindrance or threat. In this light, understanding the family background of ragpickers may help clarify their reasons for leaving home and education for a life on the streets.

The average family size of child ragpickers is 5.4 members (Table 3.6), which is slightly higher than the national average of 5.1 (CBS, 2000). However, girl ragpickers usually come from larger families (6.3) than boys do (5.2), which may indicate that family size is a factor in the incidence of girls compelled to work as ragpickers.

Although previous studies indicate that most ragpickers or street children come from single or no-parent families, this assessment shows that the large majority (60.3%) of children interviewed have both parents (own or biological father and mother). Within the remaining portion, the amount of children belonging to families with a stepparent (18.7%) is much higher than those with either a single parent (13%), or no parents at all (8%). This division is much more prominent among boy ragpickers, which may indicate that more boys from families with a stepparent are driven to go to the streets for ragpicking.

Table 3.6: Family Size and Composition

Background	Boys	Girls	Total	N
Family Size				
Average	5.2	6.3	5.4	
<3	9.8	2.8	9.0	27
3-5	46.6	36.1	45.3	136
6-8	36.7	50.0	38.3	115
9+	6.8	11.1	7.3	22
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
Family composition				
Both parents	57.6	80.6	60.3	181
Single parent	13.3	11.2	13.0	39
Parentless	8.7	2.8	8.0	24
Step father	7.6	2.8	7.0	21
Step Mother	12.9	2.8	11.7	35
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
N	264	36	300	

3.7 Family Economy

Three indicators were chosen to determine the economic background of child ragpickers' families. They were home ownership, farmland ownership and family occupations. Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) indicated that their family owned a home, either at their place of origin or at their current place of residence (Table 3.7). This is especially true among girls, 78 percent of whom reported that their family owned a home compared to 66 percent of boys. Yet the majority of child ragpicker families (54.7%) do not own farmland.

The main occupation among families of child ragpickers is of a non-agricultural nature (58.3%), which may include small business, mechanical work, low-paid services, and other such activities. A substantial portion of the children (23%) came from families whose main activity is either in junkyard shops or ragpicking, though that correlation is considerably higher among girls (41.7%) than boys. Children whose families are involved in their own farming is 9.3 percent, with a much higher rate among boys compared to girls. The findings indicate that the tendency for children to turn to ragpicking may be associated with landless families involved in low-paid, non-agricultural activities.

Table 3.7: Economic Status of Family

Status	Boys	Girls	Total	N
Have a home				
Yes	66.3	77.8	67.7	203
No	33.7	22.2	32.3	97
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
Have farm land				
Yes	45.1	47.2	45.3	136
No	54.9	52.8	54.7	164
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
Family Activities				
Own Farming	9.8	5.6	9.3	28
Agri. Labour	6.1	2.8	5.7	17
Non-agri activity	59.8	47.2	58.3	175
Junk/Ragpicking	20.5	41.7	23.0	69
Don't Know	3.8	2.8	3.7	11
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
N	264	36		300

3.8 Characteristics of Child Ragpickers by Definition of Street Children

Child ragpicking differs from other forms of child labour in that it belongs to the street children category. Although in some cases the term ‘street children’ may not be considered appropriate to describe them, ragpickers do work on the streets, and many of them even live on the streets. Still, data shows that a large number of ragpickers live with their families (Table 3.8), either in their own homes or in rented houses, or in slum areas.

Interviews determined where the children find shelter, which in turn helped to classify the respondents into two groups: (i) child ragpickers “of the street” (ii) child ragpickers “on the street.” As indicated in section 1.4.2, these two categories are defined as follows: “Children *of the street* refers to children who live in the street and children *on the street* refers to children who only use the street as their working place or social hangout but live with their families” (CWS, 1996, Italics added). The two groups so formed appear relevant for analysis to ultimately facilitate the implementation of appropriate measures under the envisioned TBP. Thus, the same definition has been adopted in this RA to analyse the similarities and differences that may exist between the two groups¹¹.

Almost a third, and by far the largest portion, of the child ragpickers live in rented houses, while a significant portion of them live in junkyards (16%) or in the streets (15%). Almost all girl ragpickers come under the “on the street” category, living mostly in rented houses or slums. Comparatively, the majority of boys (54%) are “of the street,” living in NGOs or in the streets.

As indicated before, the literacy rate among ragpickers is fairly high, especially among boys. However, school attendance is more widespread among boys on the street rather than boys of the street, while girl ragpickers’ school attendance is negligible.

¹¹ Children “on the street” were determined as having their own home, living in rented houses or living in slum areas, while the children ‘of the street’ group was formed with the remaining types of sheltering .

Table 3.8: Distribution of Child Ragpickers by Age/Sex, Education, Working Hours, and Earnings

Category of shelter	<i>In numbers</i>											
	Total			05-09			10-14			15-17		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Total	264	36	300	39	13	52	179	21	200	46	2	48
<i>Of the street</i>	142	1	143	13	0	13	101	1	102	28	0	28
Public	9	0	9	1	0	1	6	0	6	2	0	2
Temple	4	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0
Street	45	0	45	5	0	5	30	0	30	10	0	10
NGOs	32	1	33	1	0	1	28	1	29	3	0	3
Junkyard	49	0	49	5	0	5	32	0	32	12	0	12
Uncertain	3	0	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
<i>On the street</i>	122	35	157	26	13	39	78	20	98	18	2	20
Rented	78	14	92	15	3	18	50	10	60	13	1	14
Own home	21	14	35	5	7	12	13	7	20	3	0	3
Landless	23	7	30	6	3	9	15	3	18	2	1	3
<i>Of the street</i>												
Literate	75	1	76	6	0	6	52	1	53	17	0	17
Illiterate	67	0	67	7	0	7	49	0	49	11	0	11
<i>On the street</i>												
Literate	62	9	71	5	4	9	49	4	53	8	1	9
Illiterate	60	26	86	21	9	30	29	16	45	10	1	11
<i>Of the street</i>												
Att. School	4	1	5	1	0	1	3	1	4	0	0	0
Not att. School	138	0	138	12	0	12	98	0	98	28	0	28
<i>On the street</i>												
Att. School	13	1	14	3	0	3	10	1	11	0	0	0
Not att. School	109	34	143	23	13	36	68	19	87	18	2	20
<i>Average working hours per day</i>												
Total	6	6	6	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6
<i>Of the street</i>	6	5	6	5	0	5	6	5	6	6	0	6
<i>On the street</i>	5	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	6
<i>Average earning in Rs. per day</i>												
Total	90	62	87	48	57	50	93	56	89	115	150	116
<i>Of the street</i>	106	150	106	62	0	62	108	150	108	118	0	118
<i>On the street</i>	72	59	69	41	57	46	74	52	70	109	150	113

All child ragpickers work for an average of five to six hours per day. However, earnings are higher among children of the street than children on the street, and tend to increase with age. Though in general boys make higher earnings than girls, it is noteworthy that girls earn more than boys in the younger age group.

3.9 Summary and Conclusions

About 3,965 child ragpickers are estimated to be operating in the various urban centres of Nepal, the highest concentrations of which are located in Kathmandu valley and Dharan. Most of these children come from rural areas, specifically from hill and mountain regions, and the proportion of them who are of Dalit, Tamang and Magar ethnic groups is quite significant

compared to the national distribution of these groups. This may indicate that these ethnic groups have a comparatively higher probability to resort to ragpicking than others.

The majority of ragpickers, whose average age is 12 years, are literate. In fact, the literacy rate amongst ragpickers is comparable to national averages, with boys much more literate than girls overall.

Family size and structure does not seem to directly influence the incidence of ragpicking among children overall, though it may be noted that more girls come from larger families, and that more boys come from families with a stepparent. Similarly, most of the children come from families who own a home, however most are involved in non-agricultural, low-paying occupations. This clearly indicates that children involved in ragpicking usually come from poor rural families.

The majority of boy ragpickers were considered 'of the street,' while almost all girls were living in rented or family homes. While the number of hours worked is similar for children in all categories, children 'of the street' tend to earn more than others in ragpicking.

Chapter IV

Ragpickers and Ragpicking

This chapter deals with the nature and working conditions of ragpicking, the problems and risks associated with this work, and the attitude of ragpickers towards education.

4.1 A New Category of Street Children

The history of ragpickers is closely linked to the history of street children. Onta (1996) describes how street children have been universalised as a new category in the last decade, although, she argues their history begins with the history of the beggars. Beggary is perceived as a morally wrong activity and beggars are believed to be cheaters who take from the society without contributing in return (Onta, 1996). As a result, society scorns beggars, and consequently, beggars have had to turn to other options for survival.

As the market of recyclable materials has increased, a number of children involved in begging turned to ragpicking. They call themselves *Khate*, a Nepali slang word coined on their habit of spending whatever they earn in one day. Initially, *Khate*, ragpickers, and street children were considered to be the same: Khates were ragpickers and ragpickers were street children. CWIN (1990a) also noted that ragpickers are basically street children, who survive on ragpicking and begging, and who resort to criminal activities when desperate for money.

4.2 Picking Rags

The term ragpickers is now more specifically applied to those persons who collect rags or recyclable materials that can be sold for money. These materials, which are usually gathered at dumpsites, riverbanks, street corners or in residential areas, are mainly plastics (both polythene and *gudiya*, or plastics pots), bottles (full and quarter size), cardboard papers, tin, aluminium, iron, brass, and copper, as shown in Table 4.1. Most ragpickers collect plastics as well as tin or aluminium products, while paper goods rank low on the list (possibly because the quality of the paper products found would be low or the revenue from these goods is not interesting?). Under the “other” category, iron is the most common material collected because it can be found easily, while other valuable materials like brass and copper are harder to find.

The price ragpickers get for their goods varies according to the quality of the materials (Table 4.2). Tins, bottles, and papers are not worth much, so they prefer not to collect these materials. However, higher-price materials such as copper, brass, and aluminium are hard to find, and may be assumed to be the product of theft. Thus, plastics and polythene are the easier and most commonly collected materials.

Table 4.1: Some Common Materials Collected by The Ragpickers

Materials	Boys		Girls		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Plastics	97.7	258	100.0	36	98.0	294
Tins/alum	74.6	197	75.0	27	74.7	224
Bottles	65.9	174	72.2	26	66.7	200
Papers	27.3	72	27.8	10	27.3	82
Others	42.4	112	44.4	16	42.7	128

Note: Others include Iron, Copper, Brass, etc.

Table 4.2: Price of Materials

Materials	Price (NRs.) Per Kg.
Copper/brass	70.0 – 80.0
Aluminum	50.0 – 60.0
Plastics (Gudiya)	16.0 – 20.0
Polythene	10.0 – 14.0
Iron	6.0 – 7.0
Tins	2.5 – 3.0
Bottle (Full)	2.0
Bottle (small)	1.0
Paper	1.0

The type of materials gathered also depends on the amount of experience of the ragpicker. Newcomers prefer to pick easy-to-find materials such as plastics and bottles, while older ones tend to be more selective and prefer to collect relatively more valuable goods such as metals and gudiyas over tins, bottles, or papers.

4.3 Ragpicking Seasons

All-season ragpickers (278/300) rely only on ragpicking for their survival. However, ragpicking is a seasonal occupation, winters being more productive and summers more slack (Box 4.1). In the rainy season, materials are wet and dirty and collecting them is very difficult because of the rain and mud. The materials they do collect often end up being sold at a lower price at the junkyards because of the state they are in. This means ragpickers may go hungry more frequently during this season. Some of them may borrow money from the junkyards to survive, which puts them in a situation of debt bondage, as they have to work for the junkyard owner until the loan is paid back. Others resort to begging or criminal activities to make up for the lack of revenue during that season.

A small portion of the ragpickers work seasonally (22/300). They live at home and work as ragpickers in the winter while they do other work in the summer. A few part-time ragpickers attend school and work as ragpickers during vacations.

The majority of respondents indicate that they prefer to work in the mornings or evenings, when people normally dispose of their garbage (Box 4.1), however, some prefer to work in the afternoons.

4.4 Perceptions About Work

During focus group discussions and when recording case histories, most of the children said they feel ragpicking is fun and fairly easy (Box 4.2).

An important factor influencing this opinion is the freedom most ragpickers associate with working on the street. They are their own bosses, do not have to apply any specific rules or schedules and can work when they feel like it. In fact, survey results show that 72.5 percent of the respondents enjoy ragpicking (Table 4.3). Most feel that since they have no other alternative, ragpicking is an easy way to make a living. However, several children express ambivalent or negative feelings about their work, saying they would change their occupation if given the opportunity. This is a common

Box 4.1: Time and Season for Ragpicking

Suresh (Boy), 13, Kathmandu

He usually goes to pick rags in the morning and the evening. He enjoys working in the winter because he collects more rags in the winter than in the summer.

Bir Bahadur (Boy), 13, Dharan

He thinks ragpicking is very hard work, from early in the morning to late in the evening. It is more difficult in the summer than in the winter, because rags get wet in the summer, so the junkyard won't give him as good a price.

Part-time Ragpicker

Ganesh (Boy), 10, Butwal, Rupandehi

He is a grade two student who lives with his parents, but spends his spare time during vacations, about three

Table 4.3: Percent Enjoying Ragpicking by Sites

Sample site	% enjoyed	N
Kathmandu (3 FGD)	66.7 (14)	21
Pokhara	83.3 (5)	6
Butwal	57.1 (4)	7
Dharan	100.0 (6)	6

tendency among older ragpickers or those who have had regular contact with NGOs working in the field of child rights. Although it was not explored further in the course of the study, it seems that the scattered NGO initiatives for child ragpickers may have had some effect on sensitising at least some of the ragpickers to the dangers of their occupation and to alternative means of livelihood.

Box 4.2: Attitudes towards Ragpicking

Kumar (13) enjoys ragpicking very much because he feels this is a quick earning job. He also feels very much freedom in this work because he can eat anything and go anywhere he likes.

Rajkumar (15) learned rag-picking from friends and started to work for survival. He does not feel comfortable doing this job, but there was no alternative.

4.5 Working Hours, Earnings, and Spending

Working long hours is vital for ragpickers. Their earnings are directly related to the amount of items collected, which depends on the number of hours they work.

On average, as stated previously, ragpickers work about six hours per day (Table 4.4; Box 4.3), although children from the younger age group tend to work slightly less than those aged 10 years and above.

More particularly, the large majority of ragpickers work five to eight hours, though almost a third of them work less than five hours per day. Very few of the children spend more than eight hours per day working, and the number of hours worked is comparable among boys and girls in the different age groups.

Data collected during focus group discussions set the average earning for ragpickers at NRs. 87 per day¹² (Table 4.5), however this number is low compared to information obtained from individual case histories and interviews. What can be determined from the data gathered, however, is that in general, older ragpickers and those who work longer hours usually

Table 4.4: Child Ragpickers by Working Hours and Age/Sex

Age/Sex of Children	% of Children by Working Hrs				N
	1-4	5-8	9-12	Mean hrs	
Age group					
5-9	30.8	65.4	3.8	5	52
10-14	30.0	64.5	5.5	6	200
15-17	29.2	68.8	2.1	6	48
Sex					
Boys	30.7	65.2	4.2	6	264
Girls	25.0	66.7	8.3	6	36
Total	30.0	65.3	4.7	6	300
N	90	196	14		

Table 4.5: Distribution of Average Earnings by Working Hours, Age and Sex

Age/Sex of Children	Average Earning (NRs.) by Working Hours				N
	1-4	5-8	9-12	Total	
Age group					
5-9	42	51	108	50	52
10-14	58	102	111	89	200
15-17	107	119	150	116	48
Sex					
Boys	62	101	130	90	264
Girls	66	61	53	62	36
Total	63	96	113	87	
N	90	196	14		300

¹² US \$1.00 = NR 74,65 (August 2001)

make higher earnings than others¹³.

The question naturally arises as to what the children do with their earnings. The simple answer is they spend all the money on food and fun (Box 4.3), especially children of the street, who live day-to-day and are not concerned with future needs. This makes them more vulnerable in days where earnings are low because they fail to collect rags or they fall sick. However, most of them have specific reasons for wanting to spend all their earnings in a day, namely:

- i) they do not have access to safe shelter where they can put away their money
- ii) they cannot open bank accounts because they do not have citizenship certificates
- iii) they may be exposed to looting from adults (junkies or street people) if they keep the money with them
- iv) when they have money leftover, they tend to share it with others in the group who have no money for food.

Box 4.3: Working Hours and Earnings

Binod (Boy), 12, Kathmandu

He goes to ragpicking in the morning at 7 a.m. and comes back at 6 p.m. in the evening. He earns about NRs 200 for his 11-hour day, about five to seven thousand rupees in a month, which he could not earn in other jobs.

Ramesh (Boy), 12, Kathmandu

He feels he is quite a lazy guy. On average, he searches for rags about four hours per day, and earns about NRs. 50 for it.

Kumar (Boy), 13, Pokhara

He goes ragpicking about 10 hours a day from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the evening, and earns about NRs. 100 to 200. He spends all his earnings on food, cigarettes, alcohol, and the like.

According to key informants and focus group discussions, several children who live with their family support them with their earnings. However, most ragpickers have little money to share, and do not send it to their families.

4.6 Work and Risks

There are genuine reasons why ragpicking is considered one of the worst forms of child labour. The risks related to the children's health and physical development, as well as the hindrance this work places on their education and psychological development, make ragpicking a particularly adverse occupation for children. This section considers the issues related to health and hunger, use of substances, involvement in crime, and fears.

4.6.1 Health and Hunger

Staying hungry is common among child ragpickers¹⁴ for various reasons. The children of the street, who have no home or guardians taking care of them, usually spend all their earnings in

¹³ Strangely, Table 4.5 shows that there is a decreasing pattern of earnings among girls, indicating that the more hours they work, the less they earn. This may be due to the small number of cases in the different categories. For instance, the number of girls who work for more than eight hours is three, of which two girls earn 40 and one earns NRs. 80.

¹⁴ The nature of the survey and time limitations did not allow qualifying of the concept of 'staying hungry.' The data therefore only reflects what the respondents may feel is inappropriate nourishment. Also, some of the respondents may be making this statement in the hopes of being given food.

a day, and therefore have no means of survival for days where earnings are insufficient. As for the ragpickers in the “on the street” category, most come from families who are living in precarious economic conditions, and where overall earnings may be insufficient to feed the family.

The structured interviews reveal that a considerable proportion, about 27 percent, of ragpickers declared having stayed hungry during the week preceding the survey (Table 4.6). This is slightly more pronounced in the younger and older age groups, which may be explained by the lower efficiency of the younger children and the higher reluctance among older children to do “dirty” work.

Falling sick is another common phenomenon among child ragpickers. Most are not aware of the health risks associated with the nature of their work, and are generally uneducated about health. In addition to the physical hazards of ragpicking, such as wounds and cuts inflicted by glass or metal pieces, ragpickers are subject to illness due to cold, inappropriate nourishment and exposure to contaminants or bacteria.

Specifically, the survey shows that about 62 percent of the ragpickers interviewed have experienced sickness as a result of their occupation (Table 4.6). Among those, 73.1 percent reported that they consulted the doctor for treatment. Furthermore, the study shows that boys are more aware than girls on this matter, as 74.4 percent of them, compared to 63.6 percent of girls, went for medical treatment. Most ragpickers were aware of local NGOs working for children and the fact that they provide medicine and treatment. It is common for ragpickers, therefore, to go to NGOs for treatment when they get wounds, cuts, and other illnesses (Box 4.4). Fewer girls do so, probably because they are less exposed to these NGOs since they live mostly with their family.

Table 4.6: Percentage Distribution in the Prevalence of Sickness and its Treatment

Age/Sex	Hun-ger	Sick-ness	N	Treat-ment	N
Sex					
Boys	27.3	62.1	264	74.4	164
Girls	22.2	61.1	36	63.6	22
Total	26.7	62.0	300	73.1	186
Age group					
5-9	30.8	48.1	52	48.0	25
10-14	24.5	65.5	200	78.6	131
15-17	31.3	62.5	48	70.0	30
Total	26.7	62.0	300	73.1	186

Box 4.4: Tendency To Look for Treatment

Bir Bahadur (Boy), 13, Dharan

He thinks ragpicking is detrimental to his health because he has to work in an unhygienic environment. After suffering a cut one day while working he went to UPCA for treatment, where they gave him medicine and something to eat.

Binod (Boy), 12, Kathmandu

He is aware of the services provided by CWIN to children. “Once, one of my friends took me over there when I was sick, and they took care of me, so now, I go there for treatment whenever I get wounded or sick.”

Children resenting NGOs for not providing medicine

In Narayanghat, children were quite reluctant to participate in interviews. When asked why, one replied, “The Youth Club does not give us any medicine, and you are coming with club person, so we don’t want to talk to you.” Further investigation into the situation revealed that there were insufficient medical services available in the area, but that a street children’s programme has been undertaken in collaboration with Save

4.6.2 Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Apart from food, a majority of the children interviewed spend their money on smoking, alcohol, and drugs. Smoking is quite common among child ragpickers, as shown in Table 4.7, with 53 percent of ragpickers overall admitting to smoking. That trend is negligible for girls, while almost 60 percent of boys smoke.

Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between the age group and the prevalence of smoking: the average number of smokers more than doubles between the 5-9 and the 10-14 age groups, and increases another 33 percent in the 15-17 age group. Clearly, age and sex are direct factors in the incidence of smoking among ragpickers.

Similarly, age is a factor in alcohol intake. While 23.3 percent of ragpickers overall claim to consume alcohol, most of which are boys, the percentage of children in the older age group who drink alcohol is almost 20 points above average.

As street children, ragpickers are potentially highly vulnerable to drugs, since they are more likely to be exposed to drug addicts and suppliers. In fact, the higher instances of drug usage among ragpickers occurred in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal and Dharan, (Box 4.5) areas where drugs and drug users are generally more prevalent.

Once again, the correlation between age and usage can be clearly observed when it comes to drugs. While none of the younger ragpickers use drugs, six percent of boys in the middle age group confessed to doing so, and the incidence more than doubled for the older children. Key informants report that some ragpickers in border towns such as Dharan and Bhutwal are also involved in drug trafficking for which they get rewarded with money for food and a small dose of drugs.

Table 4.7: Percentage Distribution in the Use of Substances

Age/Sex	Use of Substances			N
	Smoking	Alcohol	Drugs	
Sex				
Boys	59.8	26.1	7.6	264
Girls	2.8	2.8	-	36
Age group				
5-9	25.0	11.5	-	52
10-14	52.5	22.0	6.0	200
15-17	85.4	41.7	16.7	48
Total	53.0	23.3	6.7	300

Box 4.5: Smoking, Alcohol, and Drugs

Kumar (Boy), 13, Pokhara

Sometimes, he earns good money, which he spends on cigarettes, alcohol and cinema. Whatever money he has left over he spends on food.

Som (Boy), 14, Pokhara

He spends all his money on smoking, drinking, gambling, and sometimes using hashish. Sometimes, he does not even care about food.

Ramu (Boy), 17, Butwal

He is addicted to *Petcha*, a slang word for drugs. He gets an injection of drugs before going to collect rags, and feels that without *Petcha*, he cannot enjoy this work.

It should be noted here that results reported on cigarette, alcohol and drug usage vary greatly between individual interviews and FGDs. For instance, the number of children reporting cigarette or alcohol consumption raised to a staggering 90 percent in group discussions, as did the incidence of drug usage among older children, particularly in Butwal and Dharan. This may be accounted for by the phenomenon of 'peer pressure,' which could incite some children to say they smoke or drink if their peers do, or, contrarily, it may be that children are shy to admit, in a one-on-one interview, to using these substances.

4.6.3 Freedom, Crime and Fear

Most ragpickers live a free lifestyle without guardians and employers. In fact, many of them

report that they left home because they were not free at home, by which they mean that there should be no obstacles against what they want to do, where they want to go to, or what they want to eat and use. There are many examples of children who were adopted and enrolled in school, but who eventually returned to their life on the street (Box 4.6).

Box 4.6: Free Nature of Ragpickers

Kumar (Boy), 13, Pokhara

Kumar has completed grade 3 and is quite clever, so CWIN has tried three times to enroll him in school with their support. However, he dropped out every time. Kumar explains: "I am free in this work because I can eat anything and go anywhere I like. Studying in school is good, but people are not free in school. I cannot stay in one place more than an hour."

Manoj (Boy), 14, Dharan

Though he has a home in the city, Manoj prefers to live in the street with his friends and work as a ragpicker. He does not want to live at home with his family because he cannot smoke and drink in front of them, and feels more free and comfortable with his friends on the street.

Ragpickers are also highly likely to be involved in criminal activities, through either their own compulsion or adult coercion. Lack of money for food and entertainment often pushes younger ragpickers and newcomers into begging, while older, more experienced children will resort to pick-pocketing or other criminal activities. These activities may include theft, drug peddling and trafficking from borders, prostitution, and gang fight. Research pointed out that many boys from the older age group in Butwal and Dharan were involved in drug peddling and trafficking, and group discussions revealed that adults forced them into these activities (Box 4.7).

Box 4.7: Drug Use

Butwal, Group Discussion

The notable thing is that during the discussion the moderator asked, "can I do this job?" One of them answered no. He further asked, why? A respondent says, "you do not know them, drug seller in the border does not believe you, they believe in only a certain person including me." He again asked, could you tell me who is that person who tells you to bring drugs here from Sunauli border? He responded boldly, no.

Dharan, Group Discussion

In Dharan, a boy of around 15 during the group discussion says, "there are many youth addicts both boys and girls, mostly from the *Lahure*¹ family. Girls also involve in prostitution to earn money for drugs. They even use us sometimes for sexual intercourse, especially when they fail to catch the clients. If you are interested, I will introduce them with you."

Ragpickers are territorial, and though most of them are very mobile, going from one group to another may sometimes be risky. Fights may even break out between groups of ragpickers if one is found looking for rags in the other's territory (Box 4.8).

Box 4.8: A Heavy Gang Fight Between the Ragpickers

Anaamnagar, Kathmandu

It was in the middle of December, 2000, when our field survey was just beginning. There was a heavy gang fight between the groups of Anaamnagar and Kaalopool. The fight lasted five days in a series of revenges from one or the other side. During the fight, two children were severely injured by Khukuri, and had to be treated at the CWIN health centre.

In addition to exposure to drugs and violence, ragpickers are also exposed to the risks of

STDs and HIV/AIDS, as they are often involved in various sexual activities, sometimes by force, though some also visit low-price prostitutes, and are therefore vulnerable to HIV/AIDS (Box 4.9).

Box 4.9: Sexuality and HIV/AIDs

During the group discussion in Dharan, all participants admitted that they have sex with a dumb girl who lives in the bus park.

CWIN reports that some children are involved in sexual activities, and work as pimps around the Gangabo bus park. They have heard that tourists use street children for sexual activities, and three boys who frequent CWIN have tested positive to the HIV virus.

Sanu, a ragpicker in Narayanghat, relates that adult drunkards and addicts force child ragpickers to perform sexual activities with them.

Manoj, a ragpicker in Dharan, admits that ragpickers are involved in sexual activities among themselves, calling it *Jot Maareko* (slang word of homosexual sex), and sometimes visit prostitutes.

Another threat in the ragpickers' lifestyles is being taken into police custody. Key informants recount that child ragpickers are often victim of the polices' whim, who systematically suspect them of theft or conspiracy.

Survey results illustrate this point, as 108 out of 300 respondents report having been taken into police custody (Table 4.8). Among them, most were accused of stealing (39%), or were apprehended for being in the street too early in the morning or late at night (28%). Many of the participants claim the police arrested them without any reason (18.5%), while very few report being arrested for fight or drug-related reasons. Many ragpickers accused the police of mistreating them while in custody, either by beating or humiliating them.

Table 4.8: Reasons for Police Arrest

Reasons	%	N
Stolen	38.9	42
Reference to stealing	5.6	6
Late night & too early	27.8	30
Fight	6.5	7
Drug related	2.8	3
Without reason	18.5	20
Total	100.0	108

Table 4.9: Current School Attendance by Age, Sex and Ethnicity

Background	Currently Attending	Total N
Sex of Children		
Boys	6.4	264
Girls	5.6	36
Age group		
5-9	7.7	52
10-14	7.5	200
15-17	-	48
Ethnicity		
Brahmin/Chhetri	3.8	53
Dalits	3.2	63
Tamang	12.8	39
Magar	11.1	36
Other Hill Ethnic	8.0	25
Tarains	5.0	80
DK		4
Total	6.3	300

Note: Other Hill Ethnic includes Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, and Bhujel, and Dalit includes Kami, Damai, and Sarki.

4.7 Work and Education

4.7.1 Current School Attendance

It was previously established in this study that a considerable proportion of child ragpickers are literate even though they were illiterate at the time they left home. Many of them became literate through various NGO programmes¹⁵.

A little over six percent of child ragpickers reported attending school at the time of the survey (Table 4.9), all of whom are from the two younger age

¹⁵ Municipalities are also running non-formal education (NFE). They provide basic education for children who are not able to attend school due to various reasons. However, municipal authorities themselves realize that the coverage of municipalities' programmes have failed to reach the real target population compared to programmes run by other local NGOs.

groups. Older children tend to look for alternatives to ragpicking in their spare time, rather than education.

Survey data exhibits a trend related to ethnicity in school attendance. Apparently, children from hill and mountain ethnic groups such as Tamangs, Magars and other hill groups exhibit higher school participation than other ethnic groups. According to key informants, this may be due to the availability of local NGO non-formal education (NFE) programmes. These programmes are concentrated mostly in the Kathmandu and Butwal areas, where there are large concentrations of Tamang and Magar child ragpickers. Though there seems to be a clear benefit to these programmes, the challenge remains in enrolling the children, as some display little interest in joining NGO activities, and others report having been beaten by older ragpickers in the same programmes. In most cases, actually, child ragpickers only frequent NGOs in case of illness or as a hangout place when they have gained good earnings that day.

Table 4.10: Percent Want to go to School

Age/Sex	%	N
Sex		
Boys	64.0	247
Girls	79.4	34
Total	65.8	281
Age group		
5-9	70.8	48
10-14	70.3	185
15-17	43.8	48
Total	65.8	281

4.7.2 Attitude Towards Education

Though most of them do not attend any type of schooling, the child ragpickers are generally positive towards education. Many of them are aware of the benefits of education and would like to go to school to build a better future¹⁶. As a matter of fact, Table 4.10 shows that a considerable majority (66%), especially girls (79.4%), reported that they would be eager to go to school if somebody or some organizations took care of their expenses. However this attitude is notably lower among those who are aged 15-17 years (43.8%), probably because older children want to move away from ragpicking, which they become uncomfortable with, to carry out other jobs. Furthermore, many of them are reticent to attend school along with younger children. However, there are some exceptions (Box 4.10).

Box 4.10: A Success Story

Saroj Rai (Boy), 15, was a street child working as a ragpicker and living with friends. One day a man from a local NGO approached him and told him about UPCA and the work they do for children like him. Though most of his friends felt they could not trust him, Saroj followed the man and got enrolled in a non-formal class. He demonstrated such willingness to learn that he later got enrolled in a local school with UPCA's support to pursue his education. Unfortunately, as UPCA could only support his schooling expenses, Saroj soon had to return to ragpicking to provide for food and clothing. When they became aware of this issue, the organization decided to arrange for Saroj to be able to earn additional money by giving him training in newspaper publication and other fields. Since then, Saroj has become the editor of a special bulletin, *Bal Charcha* (about children), published by UPCA. This allows him to continue his education while looking after his extra expenses.

4.7.3 Compatibility between Education and Ragpicking

The nature of ragpicking as described previously in this report represents a considerable challenge to the pursuit of education. Since most children work long hours everyday to ensure their survival, time for schooling or education is not available. In addition, earnings may not cover all expenses required for them to go to school, and many children reported that they

¹⁶ There are some examples that some natives, organizations, and foreigners have supported children for schooling. These activities have really contributed to children at least being aware of their education right.

would go to school only if expenses for schooling, food, lodging, and clothing were paid for (Box 4.10).

Information in Table 4.11 gives further insight into the incompatibility of education and ragpicking. The main reason for dropping out of school among them, especially for girls who usually come from larger families, is that their family cannot afford school expenses (36.3%). Along a similar line, many report that they are not sent to school, but rather are required to work to help sustain the family (22.8%).

Table 4.11: Reasons for School Drop Out by Sex

Reasons	Boys	Girls	Total	N
Could not afford	33.2	58.8	36.3	102
Personal Cause	23.9	23.5	23.8	67
Work/Parent	23.5	17.6	22.8	64
Family Problem	9.3		8.2	23
Fail/Teacher	8.1		7.1	20
Others	2.0		1.8	5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	281
N	247	34	281	

When looking at the situation in Nepal, the reality is that though education is free, many children do not go to school or drop out. This is mainly caused by socio-cultural issues, such as the parents' ignorance of children's rights, mistreatment by teachers in schools, and an overall poor education system in rural areas.

Yet personal reasons (such as dislike of school, peer influence, and wanting to see the city) also come into play in the decision of dropping out of school (23.8%). This may also be blamed on the poorly adapted education system, according to key informers. In an environment where most live hand-to-mouth, the time required to obtain a degree in the prospect of being qualified for a job may seem unjustifiable¹⁷.

4.8 Summary and Conclusions

The work of ragpickers usually consists of collecting various used materials at street corners and other dumping sites to sell them at variable prices to junkyards. While mornings and evenings are peak hours for ragpicking, ragpickers commonly work a full day (six hours per day) for their survival. Their earnings range from NRs. 50 to 300¹⁸ a day, though it fluctuates greatly depending on their age, the amount of hours worked in a day, and the season. Summers are a difficult time for them due to the poor conditions in which they have to work and the deterioration of the materials they are collecting.

Ragpickers live a day-to-day lifestyle, usually spending all the money they earn in a day, which means they often face the situation of not having enough money to feed themselves. This draws them to either borrow money from junkyards, putting them in a bonding situation, or to resort to petty crime such as begging, theft, or other criminal activities.

Due to the nature of their work, child ragpickers are greatly subject to hunger and illness. They are often in a vulnerable position towards adults who may abuse them, or the police who may persecute them. As street children, ragpickers are also more likely to be exposed to alcohol and drug abuse, and they are prone to be coerced into criminal activities such as drug

¹⁷ Vocational education and training seems to be a better approach for children of disadvantaged families, since it will allow them to get a job in a shorter period of time. Different NGOs provide vocational education for grown-up street children including ragpickers.

¹⁸ US \$1.00 = NR 74,65 (August 2001)

peddling and prostitution by adult criminals.

Though school dropout rates are high amongst them, most child ragpickers say they would go to school if they were provided with appropriate financial support. A conventional schooling system might not be well adapted to their way of life, but proper vocational training may be a suitable way to provide child ragpickers with a certain degree of education and allow them to find alternative, better-paid jobs.

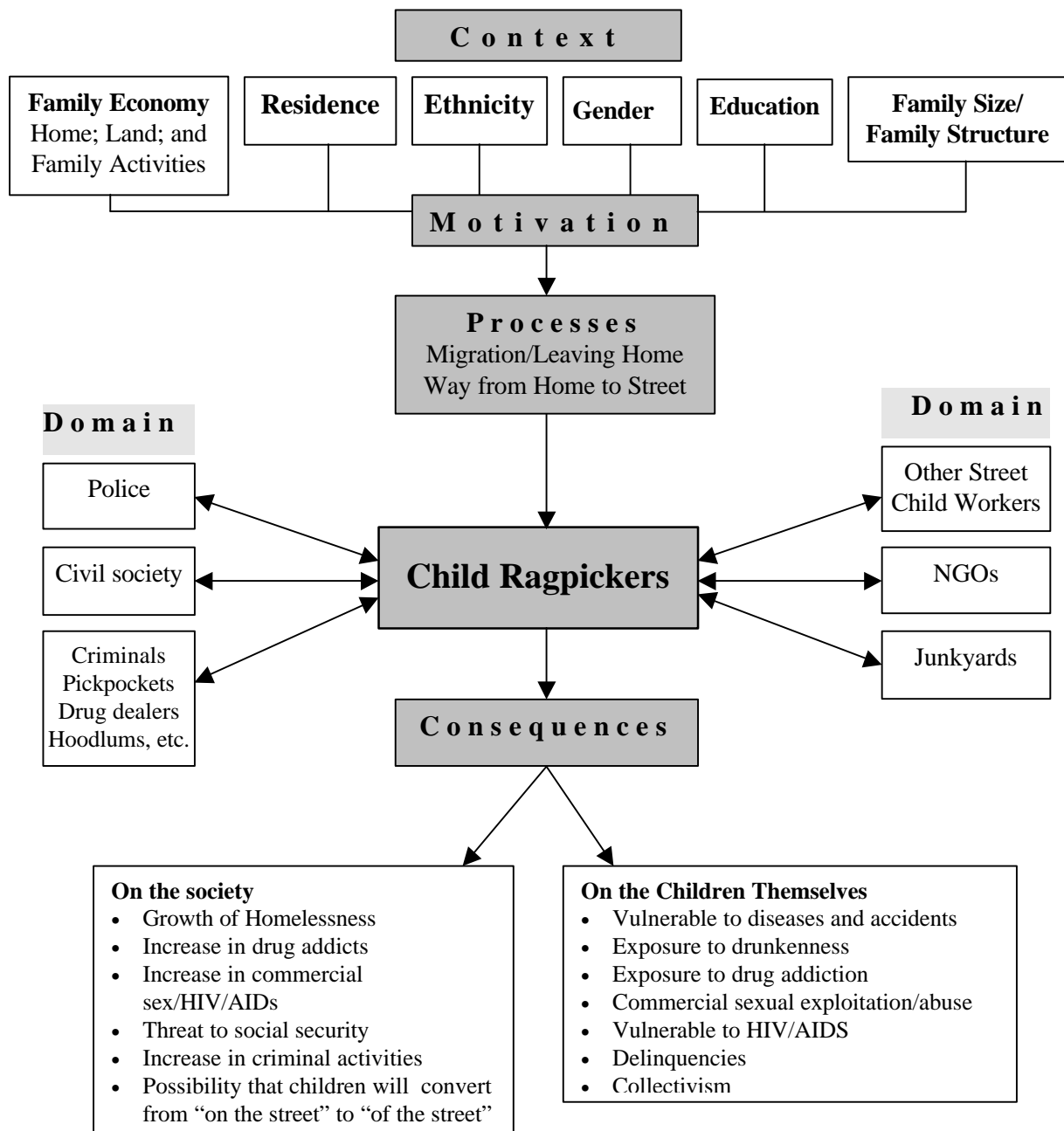
In light of ILO Convention 182, the research data clearly indicates that child ragpicking constitutes one of the worst forms of child labour.

Chapter V

Universe of the Ragpickers

This chapter deals mainly with the context of ragpickers' background, what led them to ragpicking, the domain and environment they live in, and the consequences of ragpicking on their own life and society at large. In order to conceptualise the universe of ragpickers, the following flow chart was designed (Figure 4) to illustrate the context, process, domain, and the consequences of ragpicking.

Figure 4: Universe of Child Ragpickers



5.1 The Context

The context is defined here in terms of family economy, residence, point of origin, ethnicity, gender, education, and family size and structure.

As discussed previously, the majority of child ragpickers come from severely deprived families who have no home, are landless or have marginal land. They generally originate from rural areas with road access to urban centres. Most belong to the Dalits and hill ethnic groups who are overall more affected by poverty and illiteracy. Their illiterate guardians, involved in low paid manual labour, usually cannot afford to send them to school, and are less likely to be aware of their children's rights or be concerned with their development. Family size and structure may also be factors in driving children to leave home, though they may not be primary factors. In fact, it seems that poverty and the prospect of obtaining work in urban centres, where new industries have been introduced, are the main elements that may motivate children to migrate to cities in search of a better lifestyle.

5.2 The Process

As shown in Table 5.1, the majority of child ragpickers are migrants. Half of them moved with guardians, while the other half are runaways. Those who migrate with guardians were usually involved in different types of work before they ended up on the street. As a matter of fact, focus group discussions showed that many ragpickers had worked in hotel/restaurants, manufacturing, or as domestic servants. The difficult work and inappropriate wages often compel them to go to the street in search of an “easier” occupation.

Table 5.1: Migrant Status of Child Ragpickers

Migrant Status	Boys	Girls	Total	N
Non-migrant	32.2	63.9	36.0	108
Migrant	67.8	36.1	64.0	192
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	300
Total N	264	36	300	

Most of the ragpickers fall into one of four categories:

- those who have left home and ended up on the street,
- those who came to the city for another job and later moved on to ragpicking,
- those who were taken to the city and abandoned, and
- those who live at home but come to the street daily to pick rags.

The reasons for them to leave home and come to the street can be further subdivided into various social or personal situations. The highest percentage of ragpickers reported that they left home due to family problems (28.5%), stepparent or parental abuse (14.9% and 13.6% respectively). Parents' migration (27.2%) and poverty (19.3%) were also among the main factors, though peer influence and the attraction of city life are not negligible (Table 5.2). The process by which these children become ragpickers also varies, but half of them report having been initiated into this occupation by friends (Table 5.3).

Table 5.2: Reasons for Leaving Home

Reasons	%	N
Poverty	19.3	44
St-father/mother' abuse	14.9	34
No one to look after me	6.1	14
Came with Parents	27.2	62
Abused by parents	13.6	31
Fail (School)	.9	2
Peer influence	6.1	14
To see bright-light city life	10.1	23
Seeking for job	1.8	4
Total	100.0	228

Although the research team came across a few examples of former ragpickers who had found new occupations, little is known about how street children, and particularly ragpickers, abandon their lives on the streets, and more research is needed to shed light on the issue.

5.3 Domain of Ragpickers

There are six basic social sectors related to ragpickers. They consist of other street children, local NGOs working for child rights and development, junkyard owners who buy materials from ragpickers, the police, civil society, and people involved in criminal activities with whom the ragpickers may interact.

5.3.1 Ragpickers and Other Street Children

Ragpickers only represent a portion of the category of street children. Other street children do other types of work such as street vending, manual labour, workshop work, hotel/restaurant service, etc. Ragpickers often interact with these other children, who may have more street experience than them or could provide them with alternative jobs.

Another note should be made here about the relationship ragpickers have with other ragpickers within their groups. The group environment is usually quite positive, and does not display any discrimination. Children from the same group share their earnings or food with each other. This is illustrated by the following anecdote: Some ragpickers were weighing their rags at a junkyard in Bhutwal, when a younger ragpicker came in crying. When asked why by an older boy, he answered, “Santosh beat me and took my sack.” The older boy went to Santosh, kicked him several times and took the sack back.

5.3.2 Ragpickers and NGOs

NGOs provide humanitarian help and socialisation support to enhance the rights of street children and other children at risk. They also work for the reintegration of children into their families. Child ragpickers often consider NGO personnel as guardians and NGO locales as home. Many sleep in the NGO common rooms after a day’s work (Table 5.4). They go there for treatment when they get hurt and sick or simply to hang out when they have had a good day. Many children have benefited from NGO services such as literacy and education, awareness and even guardianship.

5.3.3 Ragpickers and the Junkyard Owners

A considerable portion of child ragpickers (16.3%) report living in junkyard shops at night (Table 5.4). In addition to shelter, junkyard owners also often provide loans to children when they need money for food, which they have to pay back by collecting rags for them, as a type of debt-bondage.

Table 5.3: Persons Who Influenced Children to be Ragpickers

Persons	%	N
Parents/relatives	24.0	72
Self	26.7	80
Friends	49.0	147
Others	0.3	1

Table 5.4: Shelter of Respondents

Shelter of Children	Total	N
Rented Home	30.7	92
Anywhere	20.3	61
NGOs	11.0	33
Own Home	11.7	35
Home at slums, squats	10.0	30
Junkyard shops	16.3	49
Total	100.0	300

In fact, the relationship junkyard owners have with ragpickers can often be described as being exploitative. Apart from cheating the children when weighing materials and exploiting them by demanding payment for shelter or food (Box 5.1), some junkyard owners also indirectly encourage children to steal materials like metal goods for their benefit.

5.3.4 Ragpickers and Civil Society

The relationship of ragpickers with civil society is very antagonistic. Most people do not trust them and do not even want them in their neighbourhood, feeling that these *Khate* represent the worst characters of society.

By contrast, however, most ragpickers have a very lively relationship with marginalised families living in slum communities. They help each other and understand each other's situation, though at times they may encounter problems with local slum dwellers if they are suspected of stealing.

As for their impression of society, ragpickers say they would prefer not to re-enter it, as they enjoy the freedom, albeit precarious, of their lifestyle, and regard social life as constrained.

5.3.5 Ragpickers and the Police

The relationship of ragpickers with the police is harsh. As an unwritten rule, police consider ragpickers to be thieves and pick-pockets, and automatically suspect them of crimes. Very few of the children interviewed had not been in police custody. According to them, the police sometimes rob their money, or ask for illegal levy against their freedom. They may even encourage the children to go pick-pocketing and to share the earnings with them. Most children have a strong fear of the police and see them as a danger to them rather than a protector (Box 5.2).

There is an interesting triangular relationship between ragpickers, junkyard owners and local police. Each group is very knowledgeable about the others, but maintains strongly suspicious and highly negative relations with them.

Box 5.1: Exploitation of Children by Junkyard Owners

Junkyard, Meghauli bus park, Bharatpur

A junkyard owner, who used to be a ragpicker before, provides shelter, food, and loan for ragpickers. Though shelter is free of cost, the children have to work in order to pay him back for food and loans, which makes them bonded labourers. They are not even allowed to go to other junkyards without his permission, even if they have no loan to pay back.

Box 5.2: Relationship between Ragpickers and the Police

At a group discussion in King's Way, Kathmandu a participant claimed: "The police are living from the fruit of our labour. Though they are government servants and get a salary, whereas we *Khate* have to collect rags to make a living, we have to give *them* money, and even sometimes pay for their dinner and drinks, otherwise, they treat us as criminals."

5.3.6 Ragpickers and Criminals

People involved in illegal activities such as criminals, pick-pockets, drug dealers, and hoodlums, exploit child ragpickers in different ways. According to key informant interviews and focus group discussions, many children have been used as drug peddlers in Butwal and Dharan, and some as middlemen for commercial sex in Kathmandu. Adult hoodlums sometimes force them to steal or pick-pocket. Some street 'dadas' often visit the junkyards to raise 'hapta'¹⁹ from ragpickers, and beat them if they do not comply. In addition, several child ragpickers have been sexually exploited and abused by street bandits and other criminals.

5.4 Consequences

Though ragpicking could arguably be regarded as one of the consequences of a dysfunctional society, resulting from a disorganised as well as failed development process, one must also consider the negative impact that the prevalence of ragpicking has on society. The phenomenon of ragpicking has many consequences, both on society and on the children themselves.

5.4.1 On Society

Due to high population growth and rampant poverty throughout the country, the prevalence of under- and unemployment has also been increasing. In many cases, this has led to family disintegration, which may have caused children to leave home to tend to their own survival. This growing tendency for children to end up on the street in urban areas represents a great threat to the development of society.

Though they may be smart enough to survive on the streets, ragpickers are exposed to or are involved in criminal activities, as they are easy targets of exploitation by criminal gangs. Many child ragpickers are actually involved in illicit activities related to alcohol, drugs, and sexual activities. Furthermore, they are more inclined to become victims of drug addiction or prostitution as they work in close proximity with people of this milieu. In the long term, this may result in the spreading of HIV/AIDS, especially in urban centres.

5.4.2 On the Children Themselves

Compared to school-going children, ragpickers have a completely different perspective on life, and a higher sense of survival, co-operation and resourcefulness. Their lifestyle on the street has made them clever in handling conflicts and other difficult situations, and being part of a group has given them a sense of collectivism and responsibility towards others. Yet, most of the consequences of ragpicking on these children's lives are detrimental to the development of their future. Since they have no education or skills their prospect of finding jobs is very low. Most of them are physically weak because of their exposure to diseases and unhealthy living conditions.

Child ragpickers do not like restrictions and value the freedom they find in the street because most have experienced violence, abuse or maltreatment. Yet, this often leads to their indulging in delinquent behaviour because they lack a sense of social values or guilt.

¹⁹ 'Hapta' is a system of collecting illegal levy regularly. The hapta collectors are mainly street bandits (Dada, a slang word).

5.5 Summary and Conclusions

Our study shows that children most likely to leave home usually come from poor rural families with little or no land. Many of them are cases of single parent or stepparent families, whose illiterate guardians may know or care little about their rights and development.

The majority of ragpickers migrate from home into urban areas, incited by the prospect of jobs and access to facilities. Some migrate with their families, or for other jobs, and end up ragpicking.

In their domain, the ragpickers interact mainly with people from six different social circles. Among these, other street children and NGOs have a relatively positive relationship with them, while their interaction with the police, civil society, junkyard owners and criminal gangs is mostly negative.

Ragpicking has several negative consequences on the lives of these children. The environment they operate in teaches them violence, abuse, and mistreatment, which may drive them to indulge in delinquent behaviour. Exposure to alcohol, drugs, and commercial sex also represent a constant threat, and may lead to drug addiction and the contraction of HIV/AIDS.

Chapter VI

Institutional Framework

This chapter deals with the institutional framework for children and development currently existing in the country. It discusses government mechanisms, laws and legislation, and NGOs and INGOs who are working in the field of child rights and child welfare to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989 and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999.

6.1 Legal Provision and Enforcement

According to Nepal's constitution (1990), the Labour Act was adopted in 1992. Following this, the Labour Rules were amended in 1993. The Children's Act was enacted in 1992 by addressing the UN CRC 1989. The Common Law Code of 1963, the Foreign Employment Act of 1985, and the Human Trafficking Control Act of 1986 also restrict the use of child labour and protect the healthy development of children.

6.1.1 The Labour Act, 1992 and the Labour Rules, 1993

This act prohibits the employment of children and provides various safeguards to minors defining children and minors. Such safeguards include restrictions on the operation of dangerous machines hazardous to an individual's health, prohibition of carrying excessive loads and performing night duty, a limitation on working hours (six hours per day), and minimum wage for children. After the adoption of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regularisation) Act, 2000, the child labour provision of the Labour Act, 1992 was dismissed.

6.1.2 The Children's Act, 1992 and the Regulation on Children, 1995

The Children's Act, 1992 states that a child under the age of 14 shall not be employed in any work as a labourer and engaged as a labourer against his will. It prohibits the employment of a child in environments harmful to his/her health or hazardous to his/her life. It also prohibits a guardian from engaging their children in work which requires more labour than his/her physical capacity, or which may go against his/her religious or cultural beliefs.

6.1.3 The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2000

This act has already been put into effect. This calls for the prohibition of work for children under 15 years of age and the regularisation of work for children above 14 years in the worst forms of child labour.

6.2 Government Mechanism

The Department of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Transportation is responsible for labour administration and enforcement of labour legislation. This department deals with the inspection of establishments for the enforcement of labour legislation concerning health and safety at work, minimum wage, bonus and minimum age for employment (ILO, 1995). The Ministry of Health is responsible for child health, the Ministry of Education for school education as well as vocational and non-formal education to children, and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare for child welfare and development as well as formulating and implementing the respective policies and action programmes of each ministry. In order to effectively implement or coordinate social welfare activities and programmes for

children, Child and Women Development in the National Planning Commission Secretariat, the National Council for Women and Child Development, and the Children's Welfare Boards at the central and district levels have been constituted.

6.3 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The role of NGOs in advocacy on the rights of the child, information collection, and dissemination is indispensable. In Nepal, NGOs like CWIN first raised the issue of child rights and child labour exploitation. Yet it should be again noted that several children approached by researchers showed reluctance to interact with NGOs, feeling these organizations were not helpful to them. This may only reflect the reality for a handful of organizations, and most have brought genuine contributions in the improvement of underprivileged children's lives.

The Child Welfare Society (CWS) is also supporting children by operating common rooms as well as literacy programmes for working and street children. The Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) is involved in the issues of human rights and bonded labour. At the local level, the Underprivileged Children's Association (UPCA) in Dharan, the Children Contact Center in Butwal, and the Narayanghat Youth Club in Bharatpur are also working in the field of child rights. Other NGOs like CONCERN, CDS, CPC (Biratnagar), SAFE (Nepalgunj) are also contributing to help protect the rights of children at risk.

General Federation of the Nepalese Trade Unions (GFONT) and the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) are involved in the elimination of child labour through preventive measures. They provide non-formal education programmes to parents and children who are involved as labourers in different industrial sectors.

For the co-ordination of the activities of different NGOs, a networking group called the Children At Risk Net Working Group (CAR-NWG) has been formed in 1992. Now CAR-NWG has 25 member NGOs through which a variety of research and action programmes are being carried out focussing on children's rights and conditions.

6.4 International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs)

There are a number of International Non-governmental Organizations involved in the field of child rights and child welfare by providing financial and technical support for various activities in the field. They include ActionAid, Save the Children Fund UK, USA, Japan, and Norway, Plan International, and DANIDA. UNICEF and ILO/IPEC have also been actively involved in this sector in Nepal. UNICEF has helped the government prepare a ten-year Plan of Action Programme for Child Development, and ILO is supporting the Ministry of Labour in drafting a 10-year Master Plan of Action for the elimination of child labour in Nepal.

6.5 Conclusion

Institutional mechanisms, laws, acts, policies and programmes addressing child rights and children's development and welfare have been developed, yet no institution has addressed the specific issue of child ragpickers. Overall, these policies and programmes have failed to reach the real target of the worst forms of child labour. This is mainly due to poor implementation of existing laws and regulations, inadequate monitoring mechanisms, and lack of proper co-ordination among concerned government bodies and organizations.

Chapter VII

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study presents the findings of this rapid assessment on child ragpickers in some selected urban areas of Nepal. It aims to assess the nature and magnitude of the problem, work relations, causes and consequences, and the process through which the child ragpickers enter into one of the worst forms of child labour. It is based on 300 interviews with children aged 5 to 17 years of age who have been working as ragpickers for their survival.

The basic definition of child ragpickers as one of the worst forms of child labour is based on ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999. The working definition in this study includes children belonging to both the 'of the street' and 'on the street' categories.

This study is the first of its kind on the specific issue of child ragpickers. It is based on the rapid assessment methodology developed by ILO/UNICEF, which is a combination of a broad range of qualitative and quantitative survey tools. It relies on targeted rather than random sampling methods and does not require long-term participant observation.

The field research was conducted in six municipalities purposively selected. They are Kathmandu valley cities (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur), Pokhara, Butwal, Bharatpur, Dharan, and Biratnagar. The period of field research allocated was one month, which was somewhat limiting, but every effort was made to gather as much information as possible to better understand child ragpicking within that period of time.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. Structured interview (quantitative) and key informant interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), case histories, and observations (qualitative) were useful in gaining an in-depth knowledge of the issue. Key informants were NGO personnel, municipality members, police, junkyard owners, and other resource persons. Respondents for the structured interview, FGD, and case histories, were children aged 5-17 years working as ragpickers.

7.1 Summary of Findings

7.1.1 Background Characteristics

The findings are based on the interviews of 300 children ages 5-17 years working currently as ragpickers in six major municipalities, as well as on some key informant interviews.

- Child ragpickers come mostly from hill/mountain rural areas. Out of the 300 respondents, only 36 were girls. The average age of participants in the survey was 12 years for boys and 10 years for girls, and most came from the Dalit ethnic group, (21%) followed by Brahmins and Chhetris (18%).
- Based on respondents' and key informants' assessment, the total number of child ragpickers was estimated to be 2,969 for the sample sites and 3,965 overall for urban centres in Nepal, with the highest concentration in the Kathmandu Valley and Dharan.
- Almost half of the child ragpickers are literate (49%), though only 23 percent of girls were found to be literate. Literacy increases with the age of respondents.
- The average family size of child ragpickers is 5.4 members, which is consistent with the

national average, but it is slightly higher among girls than boys. About 40 percent of them were from single-parent, no-parent or stepparent families, a trend more apparent among boy ragpickers (42%) than girl ragpickers (19%).

- Ragpickers usually originate from families whose main occupation is non-agricultural labour (58.3%) or ragpicking and junkyard operation (23.0%).
- Among the children interviewed, as much as 47.7 percent, almost all of whom are boys, are 'of the street.'

7.1.2 Work and Environment of Child Ragpickers

- The child ragpickers collect mainly plastics (both polythene and *gudiya* or plastics pots), bottles (full and quarter size), cardboard papers, tins, aluminium, iron, brass, and copper. The price ragpickers get for these materials varies according to their quality and nature. The usual collecting places are street corners, dumpsites, and riverbanks.
- Most children work all seasons (92%), though winters are clearly more favourable. Mornings and evenings are peak hours for ragpicking.
- Many children enjoy ragpicking, though some indicate they feel it is dirty work. This attitude could be in part influenced by raised awareness through regular contact with NGOs.
- The average working day for all ragpickers ranges from five to six hours in length. Their earnings are positively associated with age and number of working hours.
- Child ragpickers 'of the street' earn more than their 'on the street' counterparts, especially as they become older.
- Staying hungry is common among child ragpickers (27%), who live day-to-day from their earnings.
- About 62 percent have experienced sickness related to their work, and most know they can get treatment and medicine from local NGOs.
- Ragpickers enjoy the freedom associated with their lives on the street. Smoking and use of alcohol is common among them, especially in the older age group (15-17 years) where 85.4 percent report smoking and almost 42 percent report drinking alcohol.
- The prevalence of drugs is 6.7 percent overall, but almost 17 percent of older children admit to using drugs. This trend is particularly common in the areas of Butwal and Dharan.
- Ragpickers have fear the police, dogs, and street bandits, and they are highly vulnerable to being exposed to or involved in criminal activities. Many of the children interviewed have been used in drug peddling and commercial sex as middlemen, or abused sexually.
- The nature of the ragpickers' work conflicts with the possibilities to pursue an education. However, most of the children demonstrate a positive attitude towards education, though school attendance is only 6.3 percent. A considerable majority (66%) reported they would go to school if all expenses were covered, although older children showed no interest in going to school. This may be due to self-consciousness about attending school with younger children or other conflicting interests.
- Many NGOs have been working to provide informal education to street children, and their contribution is invaluable.

7.1.3 Process, Relationship, and Consequence of Ragpicking

- Migration and leaving home are the main processes by which children become ragpickers. In fact, among the respondents, about 64 percent, mostly boys, are migrants. However, migration is only an initial step in the process, as they may go to urban centres for other jobs first and then proceed to ragpicking.
- Vulnerability within the family setting appears to be a considerable factor contributing to the ragpicker phenomenon. Poverty, parents' migration, parents' abuse or broken up families drive children to migrate to the city in search of a better life.
- The ragpickers' domain includes six other social circles. They maintain generally positive relationships with NGOs and other street children who do not work as ragpickers, while their interactions with the police and civil society is generally negative. Their dependence on junkyard owners often leads to exploitation, as does their interaction with street criminals.
- Child ragpickers develop good street survival and problem solving capabilities. However, due to their exposure to criminals, they are delinquent and vulnerable to drug addiction and HIV/AIDS.

7.1.4 Institutional Framework

- In order to implement the policies and recommendations guided by the UN CRC 1989 and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999, Nepal enacted the Labour Act 1992 and Labour Rules 1993, the Children's Act 1992 and Regulation on Children 1995, and the Child Labour Act 2000. These acts prohibit child labour in its worst forms and regulate the child labour, giving specific attention to children's welfare and development.
- The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare is the prime implementing agency under which the Social Welfare Board was established at the national and district levels to formulate, implement, and co-ordinate social welfare policies and programmes for children.
- There are a number of NGOs working for the welfare of children, such as CWIN, CWS, INSEC, UPCA, and others. International Non-Governmental Organizations such as UNICEF, ILO/IPEC, ActionAid, Save the Children Fund UK, USA, Japan, and Norway, Plan International, and DANIDA are also active in providing both financial and technical support for children's welfare and development.

7.2 Conclusions

The rapid assessment methodology proves to be well suited for gathering information in a short period of time. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and case histories were all found to be effective tools in data collection. However, precautions must be taken when selecting participants for focus group discussions, and time must be spent in building a rapport with them. Structured interviews are a must for collecting demographic information, but the questionnaires need to be kept simple and precise. It was found that conducting qualitative activities before the structured interviews helps build a positive relationship with the respondents.

The phenomenon of children resorting to street life is mostly due to their instinct to survive in hard life conditions. Ragpicking may not be their primary goal, but rather a natural progression in their search for easy work and relative freedom. But this development represents a significant problem for the children, making them vulnerable to illness and crime, and for society at large, as their reintegration becomes more difficult over time. In fact, the problem of child ragpickers is one that cannot be solved unless children from disadvantaged families are given a way to fully enjoy their fundamental child rights. The socio-psychological issues caused by poverty and family adversity, which are amplified by lack of social support and structure, contribute to the migration of these young boys and girls away from their family and environment, and into a life on the street. The more time these children spend on the street, the more difficult it is to take them away from it, as they enjoy a sense of freedom and self-dependence, which they feel they cannot have in other environments.

Therefore, the ultimate solution to this problem is by way of social awareness and action groups to help develop these children's sense of society and belonging, and provide them with the tools to reintegrate into society in an agreeable way. Such social work requires commitment and dedication from government agencies, non-government organizations and society as a whole. This process includes the support and implementation of the government policies and programmes at the national and regional levels. One way to accomplish this may be to build closer working relationships between concerned government agencies and NGOs dedicated to child rights and development.

This study also reveals that though education is accessible and provided free by the government, most children choose to abandon it. This indicates that the quality and content of the education curriculum may not be fit for children of disadvantaged areas, where the time required to get a diploma, which may not necessarily secure them a job, seems unjustifiable to them or their families. Skill development and vocational training may be more appropriate in poor rural areas.

Though many acts and policies have been introduced to address child labour issues, it is apparent that their implementation has so far had little impact or effectiveness. This may be due in part to poor monitoring mechanisms and lack of proper co-ordination or commitment among concerned government bodies, though this study has not concentrated on these aspects. Since many NGOs have already built strong foundations in their work to promote child rights and help solve children's issues, it may be beneficial for them and the government to work more closely together to fully understand the situation and design future programmes for the reintegration of these children.

7.3 Recommendations

In order to make policy recommendations, children involved in ragpicking should be categorised so each group can be addressed with appropriate approaches. Child ragpickers can be divided into three main categories:

- (a) homeless children who live on the street
- (b) children who have parents and a home at their place of origin
- (c) children who live at home but come to the street to work.

Preventive and protective measures are equally important to address the situation of child

ragpickers. A preventive approach would discourage children from leaving home for street life, which should be focussed *at the place of origin*. A protective approach would prevent the children, who are already on the street, or *at the destination*, from engaging in the worst forms of child labour. The following recommendations are ordered by priority.

7.3.1 Preventive Approach

- i. **Public Awareness:** Due to the extreme mobility of the target group, and to the fact that ragpickers originate from all areas of Nepal, strategies for the prevention of ragpicking must be centred around large-scale awareness campaigns on the dangers, causes and nature of child ragpicking. People should be made aware of children's rights. This can be achieved through advocacy with an effective Information, education, and communication (IEC) programme.
- ii. **Institutional Mechanisms:** The hazardous occupation of ragpicking is not likely to be eliminated without an efficient system for solid waste management in urban areas of Nepal. There is a need to strengthen the solid waste management system of Kathmandu, and support the establishment of sustainable community based waste management schemes.
- iii. **Education:** Education should be compulsory, relevant, meaningful, and universal to all. The content of education should be changed so it encourages children to study and drop out rates are minimised. The focus should be on vocational and skill-oriented training. Pertinent patterns of education adapted to local needs should be introduced at the regional level.
- iv. **Income Generating Programmes:** Income generating programmes should be launched for those families who are unable to send their children to school as an alternative to making their children work.

7.3.2 Protective Approach

- i. **Sensitised Law Enforcement:** Law-enforcing agencies are not sensitised to children's rights and the protection of children working in risky conditions. There is a wide range of complaints against government agencies regarding the denial of children's rights when handling their cases in justice. There should be a child-friendly justice system, and people involved in such areas should be trained and sensitised to the rights of children. Priority should be given to making the street a safer place for ragpickers and to reducing the incidence of reported police brutality against ragpickers. This can be achieved by training and sensitising police on child rights and on how to become part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.
- ii. **Counselling and Socialisation:** Counselling is the most important and basic requirement for children who have left home, who have no home and no parents, or who do not want to return home. Socialisation is important to minimise the gap between those children who generally feel hated by society, and the people living in the society who do not consider them as social element. Common rooms or gathering locales are required to provide counselling and socialisation services in the areas where child ragpickers are prevalent. Drop-in centres for child ragpickers, where they may shower, keep personal belongings safe and where there will be access to basic health facilities are important. A related function of such drop-in centres would be to keep track of

child ragpickers in the municipalities and to offer counseling on a demand-driven basis. In addition, former ragpickers will be employed as staff and community monitors in the drop-in centre.

- iii. **Issue of Citizenship:** Most child ragpickers, especially those who have no family contact at their place of origin, do not have their citizenship papers which are necessary to obtain formal work in Nepal. The government should facilitate the procurement of citizenship for these children.
- iv. **Hotline, Helpline Services:** In order to provide a range of services to children working as ragpickers, a hotline or helpline service, such as the CWIN Helpline (271000) in Kathmandu, should be arranged by the government. HMG should provide free-call telephone service to credible NGOs to undertake emergency support programmes for the benefit of these children. There are instances of such free-call services in different countries such as India, the Philippines, and Brazil.
- v. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** Rehabilitation is necessary for all child ragpickers so they can find their place in society. Whenever possible, the children who still have parents willing to take them back should be reintegrated into their families. A part of the rehabilitation process should be to provide vocational or entrepreneurship training to former child ragpickers. Due to the high cost of running such centers these could be supported on the basis of private sector co-funding.
- vi. **Informal and Vocational Education:** Informal education has proven to be an effective way to increase literacy among younger children. Once literate, they should be given vocational training, which would allow them to earn a living. Experience shows that formal education is not appropriate for these children as the time required to obtain a degree is too limiting, and the job prospects in the formal sector are low. By contrast, vocational training can provide them with valuable skills, which they can put to immediate use if the training is adapted to the availability of jobs in the market. There must be some support for employment opportunities for the skilled workers generated by the vocational education.
- vii. **Sustainable Fund Generation:** Funds can be generated by individuals and trusts to support a child's development. This fund should be used for the children's expenses in getting an education. As an example, UPCA in Dharan has been supporting education expenses for some children who are interested and intelligent but cannot afford schooling. Children of Ex-British-Gurkhas living in Hong Kong and Brunei have generated the funds to allow this.
- viii. **Public Awareness:** One of the main recurring problems among child ragpickers is marginalisation by society, which makes their reintegration even more challenging. It is therefore necessary to establish an environment in which society recognises these children as human beings, which can be accomplished through public awareness programmes focussing on child rights and development.
- ix. **Dialogue with Employers:** Junkyard owners should also be involved in the battle against child ragpicking. Attempts to work with the employers of ragpickers should center on dialogue and on the need to find solutions, possibly through joint research.
- x. **Effective Programming by Donor Agencies:** Donor agencies should have an indiscriminate monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate NGOs' work in the area. This would allow NGOs to receive funds based on the genuineness and effectiveness of

their programmes rather than their relationship with the donor agencies. In addition, programme duplication can be eliminated by better co-ordination among donor agencies. This would also help to minimise costs and maximise the effectiveness of the programmes.

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Appendix I

Findings of RA Study on Child Ragpickers

A. Background Characteristics	Findings
Estimate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2,969 in sample sites – 3,965 in total Nepal urban areas – The highest in Kathmandu (960) and Dharan (861)
Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 46.9% from hill/mountain – 32.8% from Tarai – 16.1% from India – 39.7% from rural areas
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 88% are boys – 12% are girls
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 17.3% are 5-9 years – 66.7% are 10-14 years – 16.0% are 15-17 years
Caste/Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tarai (including Muslim) 26.7% – Dalits 31.0% – Brahmin/Chhetri 17.7% – Tamangs 13.0% – Magars 12.0% – Other hill ethnic groups 8.3%
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Total 49% <li style="padding-left: 20px;">- Boys 51.9% <li style="padding-left: 20px;">- Girls 27.8%
Family size and composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Average family size is 5.4 <li style="padding-left: 20px;">- 5.2 for boys' family <li style="padding-left: 20px;">- 6.3 for girls' family – 60.3% have both parents alive – 13.0% have single parent – 11.7% have step mother – 7.0% have step father and – 8.0% are parent-less
Family Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 67.7% own home – 45.3% own farmland – 58.3% families involved in non-agricultural labour – 23% families in ragpicking and junkyard shops
Characteristics based on definition of street children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 52.3% are “on the street” child ragpickers – 47.7% are “of the street” child ragpickers – About 54% of boys are “of the street” – Almost no girls are “of the street” – More than 50% boys are literate from both categories – Working hours range from 5 to 6 hours for all categories – Child ragpickers of the street earn more than others
B. Working Condition	Findings
Type of work they do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 98.0% pick plastics – 74.7% pick tins/aluminum – 66.7% pick bottles
When do they work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Winter is better – Morning and evening are peak hour for ragpicking
Perception towards ragpicking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 72.5% enjoy ragpicking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some do not like it
Working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boys and girls work 6 hours on average - 30.0% work for 1-4 hours - 65.3% work for 5-8 hours and - 4.7% work for 9+ hours
Earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average earning is NRs. 87 - NRs. 90 for boys - NRs. 62 for girls
Prevalence of Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 26.7% stayed hungry at least one day during the week preceding the survey
Prevalence of Sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 62% experienced sickness during their work - Of the total being sick, 73.1% went for treatment
Prevalence of Substance Smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of smoking is 53.0% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 59.8 boys and 2.8 for girls - 25.0 for age 5-9 years - 52.5 for age 10-14 years and - 85.4 for age 15-17
Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of alcohol is 23.3% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 26.1 for boys and 2.8 for girls - 11.5 for age 5-9 years - 22.0 for age 10-14 years and - 41.7 for age 15-17
Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of drugs is 6.7% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7.6 for boys and none for girls - No instances for age 5-9 years - 6.0 for age 10-14 years - 16.7 for age 15-17 years
Police arrest and custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 36% experienced police arrest - 38.9% were arrested for stealing - 27.8% for being in the street until late night - 18.5% without reason
C. Education and Work	Findings
Reasons for dropping out of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 36.3% reported they could not afford it - 23.8% reported personal causes - 22.8% had to work - 8.2% due to family problems
Current School Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6.3% are attending school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6.4% for boys - 5.6% for girls - 12.8% for Tamangs - 11.1% for Magars - 8.0% for other hill ethnic groups
Attitude towards Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 65.8% want to go to school if arranged <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 64.0% for boys - 79.4% for girls - 70.8% for aged 5-9 years - 70.3% for aged 10-14 years and - 43.8% for aged 15-17 years

D. Process of being Ragpickers	Findings
Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 64.0% are migrants – 67.8% are boy migrants – 36.1% are girl migrants
Reasons for migration/ leaving home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 27.2% due to migration of parents – 19.3% due to poverty – 14.9% due to step parent abuse – 13.6% due to parents abuse – 10.1% to see bright-light city life
How did they come to ragpicking?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 49.0% were taken by friends – 26.7% by themselves – 24.0% were taken by parents/relatives
Shelter of Child Ragpickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30.7% live in rented home – 20.3% live anywhere – 16.3% live in junkyard shops – 11.0% live in NGO shelters – 10.0% live in slums, squats – 11.7% live in own home
E. Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Relationship with civil society and police is negative – Relationship with criminals is exploitative and risky – Relationship with Junkyards is both dependent and exploitative – Relationship with NGOs and other street children is positive

Appendix II Structured Questionnaire

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of Population Studies
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

A Rapid Assessment Study on Child Ragpickers
Nepal, 2000-2001

Individual Questionnaire
To be asked to children (5-17 years of age) working as Ragpickers

Survey Information

District	code	VDC/ Municipality	Ward No
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Place of interview:

Locality /place
<input type="text"/>

Date of interview:	DD	MM	YY
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Name of Location:

Name of Respondent:

Interviewer's Name and Signature:

Editor's Name and Signature:

Section I: Group Identification
(Identify the group leader and ask the following questions)

101. Do you always work in a group? Yes -1
No -2 → 103
102. How many are you in the group?
103. Do you know other (such) groups in the town? Yes -1
No - 2 → 106
104. How many groups are there?
105. What is the average number of persons in each group?
106. Where do you go most frequently for ragpicking?
River bank.....1
Container.....2
Street.....3
Other (specify).....4

Section II: Frequency of visiting

201. If I had come here yesterday at this same time, would I find you here?
Yes.....1
No2
202. If I come here tomorrow at this same time, could I find you again?
Yes.....1
No2
Not sure8
203. How many times do you come to this place in a day? (*Write number of times*)
204. Which of the following periods do you come to this place?
- | Category | Yes | No |
|---------------|-----|----|
| Morning | 1 | 2 |
| Day | 1 | 2 |
| Evening | 1 | 2 |
| No fixed time | 1 | |
205. How many days did you come here last week?

Section III: Personal Identification

301.	Name:		<input type="text"/>
302.	Age (Completed) :.....		<input type="text"/>
303.	Sex :	Male.....1 Female.....2	<input type="text"/>
304.	Mother tongue:		
305.	Caste/Ethnicity:.....		<input type="text"/>
306.	Can you read?	Yes.....1 No2 → 311	<input type="text"/>
307.	Can you write?	Yes.....1 No2	<input type="text"/>
308.	Are you currently attending school?	Yes.....1 → 310 No2	<input type="text"/>
309.	Have you ever attended School?	Yes.....1 No2 → 311	<input type="text"/>
310.	Class completed?		<input type="text"/>
311.	Can you give reasons for dropping out of school? (Or, can you give reasons for not attending school?)	Couldn't afford 1 Because of work2 Parents didn't send ...3 Schools too far4 Because of failing ...5 Others (specify) 6	<input type="text"/>

Section IV: Origin & Family Background

401. Where were you born?

District VDC/Muni Ward No.

--	--	--

402. If non-Nepalese, what is your nationality?

403. Do you have a home there?

Yes.....1

No.....2

404. Does your family own farm land?

Yes.....1

No.....2

405. What is the main work done by your family to make a living?

Agri. wage labourer2

Own farming1

Non –agri wage labourer ..3

Small Business4

Other (specify)5

406. Who among the following family members are in your home?

Yes.....1

No.....2

No.of persons

- (i) Father
- (ii) Mother
- (iii) Step-father
- (iv) Step-mother
- (v) Spouse
- (vi) Sister (unmarried)
- (vii) Brother
- (viii) Uncle
- (ix) Aunt
- (x) Other (specify)

407. Among the children of your parents

which child are you ? *(including brothers/sisters)*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

408. Where do you live here?

Rented place1

Public place2

Temple/Stupa3

No fixed place (Street) ..4

Other (specify)5

409. Are there others living with you?

None1

Family members

Others relatives3

Friends4

Other (specify)5

Note: Applicable for Migrants only.

410. Why did you leave your home?

Poverty/Hunger -1

Because of Step-father/mother

No one to look after me -3

Father/mother coming here -4

Others (specify) -5

411. With whom?

With parents -1

With siblings -

With other relatives -3

With brokers -4

Ran away alone -5

Ran away with others -6

412. Which of the following facilities are available in your village at origin?

Facilities	Yes.....1 No.....2 DK.....8	Facilities	Yes.....1 No.....2 DK.....8
School		Motorable road	
Health post		Telephone	
Agri. Service center		Bank	
Cooperatives		Police station	
Piped water supply		Post office	
Electricity		Market	

Section V: Work History

501. How long have you been here?

YY	MM

502. How long have you worked as a ragpicker?

YY	MM

503. At what age did you start working as a ragpicker?

504. Who put you into this work?

Parents1
 Relatives2
 Self3
 Friends4
 Others (specify) ...5

505. What type of things do you mostly pick?

Material	picks	doesn't pick	
Plastics	1	2	
Papers	1	2	
Glasses	1	2	
Tins	1	2	
Others (specify)	1	2	

506. What kind of job is this?

Regular.....1 → 508
 Occasional.....2

507. How many months in a year do you work as a ragpicker?

508. How many hours do you work in a day?

509. How much do you collect in a day? (in Kgs.)

510. How much do you earn in a day? (in Rs.)

511. Who buys your rags?

Junkyards.....1
 Brokers.....2 → 513
 Relatives.....3 → 601
 Other (specify)..4 → 601

512. If it is junkyards, do you think Junkyards cheat you?

Yes.....1
 No.....2

513. If it is broker, do you live with broker(s)?

Yes.....1
 No.....2

514. If broker, do you think the broker treats you well?

Yes.....1
 No.....2

515. Are you indebted with Junkyards, brokers and friends? Yes.....1
No.....2

516. If yes, with whom?

	Yes	No
Junkyard	1	2
Broker	1	2
Shopkeeper	1	2
Friend	1	2
Others (specify)	1	2

Section VI: Personal Behaviour

601. Did you last week spend any day without food? Yes -1
No -2 → 603

602. How many days?

603. Do you smoke? Yes -1
No -2

604. Do you drink alcohol? Yes -1
No -2

605. Have you tried drugs? Yes -1
No -2 → 607

606. How many times in a week do you take drugs?

607. Have you ever been arrested by the police? Yes...1
No.....2 → 609

608. What was reason that you was in custody?

.....
.....

609. Who are you fear with (most)? Police.....1
Adult/young people.....2
Drunkards.....3
Stranger (outsider).....4
Dogs.....5
Other (specify).....6

Section VII: Health

701. Have you ever been sick during the work?

Yes.....1

No.....2 → 708

702. If yes, When was the last time you became sick or injured?

Year Month

--	--

703. What type of illness or injury?

Water borne disease.....1

Respiratory problem....2

Fever.....3

Skin disease.....4

T B.....5

Back pain.....6

Injury.....7

Other(Specify).....8

704. Was anyone consulted for the illness or injury?

Yes.....1

No.....2 → 707

705. Who was consulted

Doctor.....1

Paramedic.....2

Non-paramedic....3

Homeopath.....4

Traditional healer...5

Other(Specify).....6

706. Could you afford the expenses? → 708

Yes.....1

No.....2

706. Why did you not consult?

Lack of money.....1

No health post nearby...2

Not necessary.....3

Other (specify).....4

708. Do you have any kind of disability?

Yes.....1

No2

Section VIII: Perception

801. Have any NGOs/INGOs approached you?

Yes.....1
No2

802. Would you go to school (again) if arranged?

Yes.....1
No2

803. What would you like to become when you grow up?

.....

.....