

REPORT ON HIGHWAY HAWKER CHILDREN

Executive Summary Only
2016

Dr. Bijaya Sainju



*CONCERN FOR CHILDREN AND ENVIRONMENT NEPAL
Swoyambhu, Swotandra Marga Hs No 272/10, Ward No 15,
Kathmandu, Nepal*

Executive Summary

Introduction:

Nepal is a country with an estimated population of 23.5 million (2001). The population of children under-18 years of age makes up about 40 per cent of the total population of Nepal. According to a study conducted by the Department of Population, Tribhuvan University, the number of child workers in Nepal has been estimated at about 2.6 million. However, this number may have changed as there has not been another study conducted to ascertain the number of child workers since then. It is presumed that a sizable number of child workers still exist in Nepal.

Concern for Children and Environment – Nepal (CONCERN-Nepal), a non-governmental organization working for the rights of children in general and children at risk in particular, has found that there are 84 areas of child labour in Nepal. Some of the sectors are categorized as hazardous labor and pose serious health and other threats to children working there. One of the areas that is hazardous for children is the job of highway hawking.

Scope:

CONCERN-Nepal, in cooperation with Plan Nepal, conducted a national survey in order to ascertain the number of the child highway hawkers and their condition. CONCERN-Nepal conducted the survey on major highways in 33 districts of Nepal where it found that a large number of children work as highway hawkers. The research team visited every major spot along the main highways of the country and directly met and interviewed the child highway hawkers and collected their information on various aspects.

Survey Findings:

The highway hawkers are those children under-18 years of age, who sell goods mostly edible items going into the vehicles that ply on the highways. As the buses and other vehicles come to a halt in certain commercial and other points along the highway, the highway hawkers rushed to the vehicles and approach the passengers to buy their goods. In some cases, the child highway hawkers enter the vehicle even before it completely stops. This has often caused accidents and injuries to the children.

Based on the national survey, it has been found that a sizable number of child highway hawkers exist in Nepal who have been eking out their lives by vending goods on the major highways. According to the findings of the survey, Kailali district has the largest number of child highway hawkers while Saptari, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have the least number of child highway hawkers. Of the total number child highway hawkers in 33 districts, Kailali alone has 77 such children while Saptari, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur each have four child highway hawkers.

In terms of age, children as young age six years old were found working as highway hawkers. Fourteen years old is the most common age for highway hawker children. Analyzed from the gender perspective, male children dominate the sample. Of the total number of child highway hawkers interviewed, 85.35 per cent were male children, while the percentage of female children was only 14.65 per cent. It was found that children belonging to all religious groups are working as child highway hawkers. However, the Hindus are by far the largest religious group, as the children belonging to Hindu religious group constitute 84.25 per cent. The ethnic composition is yet another major component of the survey which has found that children of all major ethnic groups are involved in this business. It was found that Chetiri is the single largest group, 13.43 per cent among the child highway hawkers, while Magar is the smallest ethnic group with only 1.22 per cent of the total number of child highway hawkers.

Of all the children interviewed, the majority of the child highway hawkers are local children with 40 per cent of the total number of child highway hawkers. The number of the migrant children is also quite sizable. The reasons that pushed the children to take up the work of child hawkers are also diverse. But most of the children took up this job because of unemployment. Altogether 44.15 per cent children responded that they had to join the work of child highway hawkers because they did not find any other source of employment either to support themselves or their families. Most the child highway hawkers were found to be illiterate. Illiterate child highway hawkers constitute 77.66 per cent of the total number. Even among the literate child highway hawkers, most of them dropped schools before completing grade eight. The number of children who studied up to grade nine and ten or above was only three per cent of the sample. Some of the children are still found to have been going to school. However, their number is very small with only 29 per cent of the total number of child highway hawkers attending school. Most of the children either did not at all go to school or dropped out in between. The children of this category constitute 48.6 per cent. The main reason given for dropping out of school was poverty, which has forced them to take up the job of child highway hawkers. However, most of the children (80.95 per cent), who dropped out schools, wanted to give continue their studies if they were given opportunities. The survey found that an overwhelming number of children (93.77 per cent) possess no special skills. Some of the children worked somewhere else before they joined the job of hawking on the highways. However, most of the children or 88.77 per cent children started this work as their first job.

The highway hawking business needs some initial start-up investment. But the majority or 73.87 per cent of children invested nothing of their own. However, others invested from 100 to 1000 rupees in the beginning to start this job.

As this is a business that involves both investment as well as transaction, the daily transaction ranges mainly from 50 rupees to 600 hundred rupees. However, the average transaction is 300 rupees a day. It was found that 41.51 per cent of children said their daily transaction was 300 rupees. Out of the total transaction, they make some profit out of which they survive and support their family members. Majority of children (69.72 per cent) make 50 per cent profit. A small number of children make profit as high as 75 per cent. Some children invested their own money and took all the profit that came from the sales. However, some children were found to have been working on wage basis. A total of 67.2 per cent children were found to have been working on wage basis while the rest invested their own money. Those who worked on wage basis are paid on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Those getting wages on a daily basis made up 71.8 per cent of the sample. Some children who worked on a daily basis were not given their wages. Their parents and guardians take their wages. Such children are in small number only 12 per cent. Those getting wages earned from Rs. 500 to as high as Rs. 6,000 a month but their number is small or only 16 per cent. Most children are not a master of their own earning. Parents of most children take their wages and keep their earnings. Some of those who take the wages save some money but majority of them do not save at all as they spend all the money for their survival. Regarding the expenditure, most children spend all their earnings. Most of the children spend their earnings on food and other basic needs. An overwhelming number of children (94.14 per cent) were found to have been supporting their family through their earnings.

The child highway hawkers often suffer a number of problems. These problems include health hazards, sickness, security related problems, low business, long working hours, low wages, accidents, harassment and verbal, physical, sexual, and mental abuses. Children were found to have been abused by their colleagues, passengers, customers, local boys, drivers, helpers and even employers. Regarding their health and hygiene, children often suffered from minor illnesses. Most children suffered from fever. But very few children (1.83 per cent) were hospitalized when they were sick. Most children took medicine when they fell sick. So far as personal cleanliness and hygiene is concerned, most children (68.01 per cent) took bathes once a week while some (18 per cent) did not take a bath even once a week. It was found that daal bhat, vegetables and meat are the most commonly eaten foods. It was found that this job is a risky one as these children are often prone to accident. According to the survey, 32.84 per cent child highway hawkers have already met with accidents while working. The accidents include both major and minor ones.

Since they have to sell goods by visiting the vehicle that stop on the certain points of the highways, children often rush to approach the passengers. While doing so, many children got into accidents and were injured—a few of them seriously. Apart from the accident and injury, children have often faced other kinds of problems and difficulties like long working hours, tough competition, low wages and health and hygiene related problems. Although the work is risky and difficult, about 48 per cent children want to continue their present work while more than 19 per cent of them want to go back home and continue their studies. Like other privileged children, the highway hawkers too have future ambitions. Some of them want to be doctors and engineers. But most children wanted to be businessmen. It was found that the majority of children highway hawkers (77 per cent) are completely unaware of Child Rights. But 22 per cent of them have heard about the Child Rights, but they still did not know their rights specifically.