

Research Article

Behavioural Dynamics of Nepali Labour Migrants to India: A Case Study of the Gaddachowki Border Crossing to Mahendranagar, Nepal

Dr. Deepak Chandra Bhatt^{1,*}¹Associate Professor, Central Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Far Western University, Nepal

Abstract

Migration between Nepal and India is rooted phenomenon since generation, integral to the socio-cultural and economic fabric of both the nations. The open border between these countries facilitates the free movement of people, offering economic opportunities but also leading to shifts in behaviour, social dynamics, and cultural practices. This study examines the behavioural patterns of Nepali labour migrants at the Mahendranagar border, a critical transit-point due to its proximity to India and its role as a major migration hub. By employing observation, face-to-face interviews, and Key Informant Interviews (KII) as primary research techniques, this study delves into the details of migrant behaviour, with a particular focus on fooding, accommodation and entertainment during the stay of primary gateway town for their origin. These behaviours are often influenced by the stresses of migration, lack of awareness, and the socio-economic conditions in both the migrants' places of origin and destination. The behavioural patterns of these migrants are shaped by various socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors. This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the behaviors exhibited by certain Nepali migrants at the Mahendranagar border, particularly their involvement in activities such as alcohol consumption and gambling. By examining these patterns, the research sheds light on the broader socio-economic challenges migrants encounters and the consequences of migration on their well-being and communities. Understanding these dynamics can help inform policies and interventions aimed at addressing the underlying issues and improving migrant welfare.

Keywords

Migrants' Behaviour, Cross-Border, Alcohol consumption, Gambling, Transit

1. Introduction

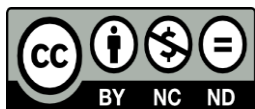
The United Nation (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO) define migration as the crossing of borders for

employment purposes, with labor migration driven by factors such as population growth, economic challenges, and limited

*Corresponding author: deepakchandra@fwu.edu.np

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resources. Cross-border labor migration between Nepal and India has a long history. However, Nepali migrants, especially from the far-western hills, face difficulties due to low literacy, limited job information, and lack of awareness, leading to struggles in selecting destinations and often returning home without success (ICIMOD, 2010). Migration is driven by the aspirations and capabilities to migrate within a perceived set of geographical opportunities. It differentiates between the instrumental and intrinsic aspects of human mobility (de Haas, 2021).

Financial constraints lead Nepali migrants to choose cost-effective travel options, often following social networks. Most male labor migrants go to India, while women stay behind due to social norms, though some women accompany husbands for medical reasons (Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2008; Thieme, 2006; Thieme & Muller, 2010). Many Nepali male migrants are of working age with limited skills (ILO, 2015). Indian laborers, especially from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, often come to Nepal for seasonal work, driven by higher wages, proximity, and no need for work permits (Gill, 2003; Thornton, 2016). The open border, a unique feature of Nepal-India relations, has facilitated the movement of millions of people, particularly for labor migration (Basyal, 2020).

Bhatt (2023) highlighted differences in job patterns between migrants from Nepal and India, both in their places of origin and at their destinations. Roughly half of the labor migrants from both countries were unemployed in their places of origin, with some engaged in agriculture or small businesses with limited income. Due to a lack of training opportunities, migrants had to acquire skills on their own. At their destinations, job types and skill levels differ, with most Nepali labor migrants falling into skill level 1 (Unskilled jobs), while Indian labor migrants tend to reach skill level 2 (Semi-skilled jobs). Both groups commonly work in agriculture and construction. Nepali labor migrants in India engage in roles such as garden and agricultural labor, manufacturing, transportation, mining, hotel work, domestic work, security, driving, and operating machinery. In contrast, Indian migrants have slightly higher skill-level jobs. The working environments and benefits for migrants differ between the two groups.

The migration of Nepalese to India dates back centuries, with people crossing the border for various reasons, including trade, pilgrimage, and employment. The 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship formalized the open border, allowing citizens of both countries to move freely and work in each other's territories. This ease of movement has led to significant labor migration, particularly from the rural and economically disadvantaged regions of Nepal to various parts of India. Bhatt (2024) highlighted that the main factors contributing to the large-scale migration of young people from Nepal to India are the lack of job opportunities and the deep-rooted tradition of working in India.

The open border and cultural tradition of working in India

are key drivers of youth migration from Nepal, especially due to a lack of employment opportunities at their origin. Nepali labor migrants are spread across various Indian cities, including distant regions like Goa, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Bangalore, while Indian migrants mostly come from nearby border areas like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal to seek work in Nepal. Nepali migrants heavily rely on family and social networks for support. However, the instability in job choices and skill levels impacts their income.

A study of Council of Europe (2023) highlights that the people mobility to destination shows different characteristics. The lack of legal frameworks for migrants with unclear status creates a complex process for reestablishing their rights, leaving them vulnerable and with limited access to basic services and health support. However, this movement is not without its challenges. Migrants often face a range of socio-cultural and economic pressures that influence their behaviour both at the origin and the destination. This article examines these behavioural patterns, focusing on key issues such as alcohol consumption, gambling, borrowing practices, and political involvement.

Migrant Behaviour at Border Areas: The Context of Mahendranagar

The border point of Mahendranagar is one of the busiest entry points for Nepali migrants returning from India. For many of these migrants, their journey does not end upon crossing the border; they often spend a night or two at nearby hotels, either due to fatigue or while waiting for transportation to their villages. During these stays, a lack of structured activities and a surplus of free time can lead to negative behaviours, such as gambling and alcohol consumption. For some migrants, the night stay becomes a time to unwind after the long journey from India, but for others, it becomes an opportunity to engage in risky behaviours. Gambling is one such behaviour that has become prevalent among migrants staying at border hotels, often exacerbated by alcohol consumption.

This study addresses a largely unexplored area of research: the behavioural dynamics of Nepali labor migrants during transit, particularly at border crossings like Gaddachowki. The primary focus is on understanding the behaviour of migrants while in transit, especially during high-traffic periods such as festivals. These times often see heightened movement and stress among migrants, which can influence their behaviour in significant ways.

The research aims to examine the effects of migrants' behaviour on their immediate surroundings, including the border areas themselves, their families, their health, and the broader society. Understanding the interactions and behaviour of these individuals during transit is essential for both short-term management of border areas and for long-term policies addressing migrant welfare. Additionally, this study will offer

recommendations for improving conditions for returning migrants at border areas. It seeks to provide solutions for mitigating problematic behaviours that sometimes arise during transit, particularly during peak migration times. Furthermore, the research will propose strategies to ensure the security and well-being of migrants as they return to their homes, offering suggestions for how authorities and support systems can facilitate their safe and secure journey back to their home.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the nuanced behaviours of Nepalese labor migrants. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this study, as they allow for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and socio-cultural practices of migrants. The research is conducted in Mahendranagar town, chosen for its strategic location near the Indian border and its role as a major hub for migrants. The researcher conducted extensive observations at key locations in Mahendranagar, such as bus stations, markets, and border checkpoints. Observations focused on the interactions of migrants, their daily routines, and the visible socio-cultural practices they engage in.

Similarly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 10 migrants. These interviews aimed to capture the personal experiences of migrants, their motivations for migrating, and the challenges they face. Interviews were conducted in Nepali, ensuring that participants could express themselves comfortably. Interviews were also conducted with key informants, including hotel owners and social workers who have direct contact with migrants. These interviews provided additional insights into the broader socio-cultural dynamics at play in Mahendranagar. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding the interview transcripts and observational notes to identify recurring themes and patterns. The analysis focused on uncovering the underlying drivers of migrants' behaviours and the socio-cultural implications of these practices.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Migration at Gaddachowki: A Snapshot

The Gaddachowki border, located in the Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal near the city of Mahendranagar, is one of the main entry points for Nepali migrants returning from India. On average, around 1,500 migrants cross this border daily, but the numbers swell to between 2,500 and 4,000 during festival seasons, such as New Year (Bishu Parb), Goura Parb, Dashain and Tihar, when many Nepalis working in India return home to celebrate with their families. The significance of this border crossing reflects not only its geographic position but also the social and economic ties between Nepal and India.

The tradition of Nepalis seeking employment in India dates back generations, and the flow of labor has become a key component of both countries' economies. However, the act of returning home is not always smooth, as various behavioural issues, especially linked to alcohol consumption, surface among the returning migrants.

Migrant Behaviour at Nepal's Border Areas: Alcohol Consumption and Its Impact on Returnees

Cross-border migration between Nepal and India has a long history, facilitated by the open border that allows the free movement of people without the need for passports or visas. Among the numerous border points, Gaddachowki is one of the busiest, particularly during festive periods when the flow of Nepali migrants returning from India increases significantly. Migration, however, is not just about movement—it has deep-rooted social, economic, and behavioural implications. One aspect that has been observed among returning Nepali migrants at border areas like Gaddachowki is the occurrence of certain behaviours, such as alcohol consumption, which has drawn attention due to its various social consequences.

In this article, we will explore the behavioural patterns of Nepali migrants at border points, with a particular focus on alcohol consumption. This exploration will look into the reasons for these behaviours, their impacts on migrants and their families, and how such behaviours shape the perception of migration within Nepal.

Alcohol Consumption at the Border

A recurrent theme observed at border crossings like Gaddachowki is the visible consumption of alcohol by many returning migrants. Studies and first-hand observations have revealed that alcohol consumption is a common behaviour among Nepali returnees, particularly at the Mahendranagar border area. This practice has deep sociocultural roots but also raises concerns due to its potential negative effects on individuals, families, and communities.

Tiredness and Alcohol as a Coping Mechanism

Migrants returning from India often appear exhausted after long journeys. Crossing the border, for many, represents the end of a tiring trip, and alcohol is frequently consumed under the pretext of relieving fatigue or stress. Migrants often refer to alcohol consumption as a way to "freshen their mood," a coping mechanism that they claim helps them unwind after the challenges of migration. However, the use of alcohol in such circumstances can become excessive. Migrants, often away from home for long period, develop the habit of drinking as part of their social experience while working in India. Upon returning home, particularly at the border, the combination of tiredness, relief, and the social environment leads many to indulge in alcohol even more heavily.

Festival Seasons: A Surge in Alcohol Use

During festival seasons, when the number of returnees at the Gaddachowki border increases, alcohol consumption often spikes. The return home for festivals is usually a time of joy, but it is also a period marked by increased social pressure, as returning migrants face expectations from their families and communities. For some, alcohol becomes a way to handle the stress of reintegration, especially when there are financial and emotional pressures involved.

For example, during Dashain and Tihar, migrants may feel an obligation to bring gifts or money for their families, but not all migrants have been successful in saving enough during their time in India. The emotional burden of failing to meet expectations can drive some migrants to consume alcohol excessively at the border before facing their families. Additionally, festive atmospheres themselves often normalize drinking, making it easier for migrants to indulge.

Alcohol as a Social Problem

While alcohol may provide temporary relief for returning migrants, excessive consumption often leads to various social problems. Conflicts with family members, dispute with fellow migrants, and even public disturbances at the border have been reported due to alcohol use. Studies have highlighted several cases where drunk migrants engage in verbal or physical conflicts at border areas, causing disruptions and, at times, requiring police intervention. For instance, a case study conducted at Gaddachowki revealed that during the Dashain festival in 2024, several incidents of dispute among migrants were reported, many of which were directly linked to alcohol consumption. Migrants, under the influence of alcohol, engaged in fights over trivial matters such as space to rest or transport arrangements to their hometowns. Such incidents not only tarnish the reputation of migrants but also place a burden on border officials who have to manage the situation.

The story of a migrant's return

Ram Kumar (pseudo name), a 28-year-old man from the remote district of Bajura in Nepal, embarked on a journey to Gujarat, India, a year ago in search of better economic opportunities. Like many young men from his village, lack of job prospects and the pressing needs of his family—an elderly and frequently ill mother, a wife, three daughters, and one son—pushed him to seek work across the border. His family relied heavily on the income he could send home, hoping it would alleviate their hardships and allow them to partake in local traditions—the Goura festival. After a year of toil in Gujarat, Ram Kumar finally made his way back to Nepal with 50,000 Indian Rupees. The timing of his return was perfect, as it coincided with the Goura festival, a significant local tradition in Bajura. His children were particularly excited, eagerly awaiting the new clothes their father would bring, and the money that could help them celebrate the festival in style.

Ram Kumar crossed the border at Banbasa-Gaddachouki and reached Mahendranagar, a key town where many returning migrants stop for the night before continuing their journey home. In Mahendranagar, feeling relieved to be back in his own country, Ram Kumar decided to spoil in some alcohol—something he had to repeat from in India due to the strict regulations there. According to the hotel owner, he consumed a bottle of alcohol, feeling a sense of freedom and relaxation that he had missed for a year. However, this initial indulgence soon led to a series of unfortunate events. Buoyed by the alcohol, Ram Kumar joined a group of friends in a card game, a common pastime among returning migrants. But the game quickly spiraled out of control. He lost 20,000 rupees—nearly half of what he had earned in Gujarat. The situation became tense, leading to a fight among the players, which attracted the attention of the local police. The police arrested Ram Kumar, adding to his troubles. To secure his release and avoid further complications, he had to pay a bribe of 5,000 rupees. By the time he was freed, it was early morning, and he had missed the bus to Bajura, costing him another 3,500 rupees in a wasted bus ticket.

Instead of cutting his losses and heading home, Ram Kumar, now disheartened and frustrated, repeated his mistakes. The next day, he drank another bottle of alcohol and spent 5,000 rupees on accommodation and food. The money that was meant to support his family and bring joy to his children was rapidly dwindling. By the time Ram Kumar left Mahendranagar, he had spent 40,000 rupees out of the 50,000 he had brought back. His family, who had been eagerly awaiting his return with hopes of a better life, were left with only disappointment. The new clothes, the extra money for the Goura festival, and the much-needed financial support for his mother's medical expenses were all gone (on the basis of information collected by hotel owner as a KII, personal observation and in-person interview with respondent).

The conclusion of Ram Kumar's story is a reflection of the harsh realities faced by many migrant workers. Despite working hard for a year in a foreign land, his lack of awareness, financial illiteracy, and poor decision-making led to a situation where he squandered most of his earnings before even reaching home. His story is not just a personal tragedy but also a cautionary tale for many others in similar circumstances.

The case of Ram Kumar highlights the urgent need for better financial education for migrant workers, awareness programs about the dangers of alcohol and gambling, and more support systems for migrants returning home. Without these, the cycle of poverty and despair that drives many to seek work abroad in the first place is likely to continue, leaving families like Ram Kumar's to bear the brunt of the consequences.

The Broader Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Migrants Health Implications

Excessive alcohol consumption has direct health

consequences for returning migrants. Chronic alcohol use, often developed during their time in India, worsens health issues such as liver disease, high blood pressure, and mental health disorders. The physical toll of migration, combined with alcohol abuse, leaves many returnees in a weakened state by the time they reach the border. Some returnees even seek medical attention for alcohol-related health problems upon arrival in Nepal. For example, interviews with health workers stationed at the Gaddachowki border point revealed that a significant number of migrants seek assistance for issues like dehydration, stomach problems, and dizziness, all of which are often linked to alcohol consumption during their journey. The long-term health effects of this behaviour remain a concern, as many migrants lack access to adequate healthcare once they return to their rural homes.

Economic Strain

Alcohol consumption can also impose a financial burden on migrants, many of whom are already struggling economically. The money spent on alcohol could otherwise be used to support their families or reinvest in their lives back in Nepal. The habit of drinking at border areas becomes an additional, often unnecessary, expense that diminishes their already limited savings.

During the festivals, when alcohol consumption peaks, some migrants spend significant portions of their hard-earned money on alcohol, reducing the amount they can bring home. This not only affects their own financial stability but can also lead to tensions within families who may have been expecting more financial support from their return.

Reintegration Challenges

Alcohol use at the border highlights deeper challenges that migrants face during reintegration. Returning to Nepal after long period spent in India involves more than just crossing a physical border; it requires psychological and emotional adjustment. Many migrants find it difficult to reconnect with their families, communities, and the traditional norms of Nepali society after being exposed to different cultures and experiences in India. This difficulty is sometimes exacerbated by the guilt or shame of not meeting family expectations, which drives some migrants toward alcohol as a form of escape. This feeling of inadequacy can lead to alcohol use as a way of dulling emotional pain, making reintegration into family life more complicated.

Possible Solutions and Interventions

Addressing alcohol consumption among Nepali migrants at the border requires a multifaceted approach. Public health campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of excessive drinking could be one potential solution. Additionally, the establishment of support services at key border points like Gaddachowki, including counseling and medical assistance, could help returning migrants manage the stress of reintegration without resorting to alcohol.

The government, along with non-governmental

organizations (NGOs), could also play a role in offering financial literacy programs to migrants before they depart for India, ensuring that they return with better savings management skills and reduced financial pressure. This could mitigate the emotional strain that often leads to alcohol consumption. Moreover, local governments in border areas could implement stricter regulations on the sale of alcohol, especially during festival seasons, when excessive drinking becomes more prevalent. By limiting the availability of alcohol at border points, authorities could help curb some of the negative behaviours associated with alcohol consumption.

Adolescence is a crucial phase for engaging in health risk behaviours, particularly as young people face unique challenges related to acculturation stress. A survey conducted at the Italian border highlights that these behaviours are shaped by a complex interplay of gender, cultural factors, and migration generation. First-generation adolescents, likely due to the challenges of acculturation and socio-ethnic factors, are more prone to engaging in risky behaviours (Koumantakis et al. 2023). They further added that heterogeneity of migrants may be the cause of risk behaviour in youth, where girls had higher smoking rate and boys engaged on alcoholic and gambling behaviours. Interestingly, no cases of female migrants engaging in gambling or alcohol consumption were observed at the Nepali border. This may be attributed to the distinct cultural norms of Sudurpaschim Province, where women are typically responsible for managing the household, caring for children, and working in agriculture (Bhatt, 2023 a). While some women do travel to India with their husbands and families, these families are not observed participating in alcohol consumption during their journey or travel. Instead, they tend to arrive safely at their destination without engaging in such behaviours, reflecting a cultural distinction in the roles and habits of women in this region.

A study explored the relationship between migration intentions and alcohol use among adolescents in high-migration communities in west-central Mexico. The findings reveal that youth, particularly boys, with plans to migrate are more likely to have experimented with alcohol. This research provides valuable insights for alcohol prevention strategies and policy development in both Mexico and the United States (Marsiglia et al., 2023). In the case of Nepali migrants, age does not appear to be a significant factor influencing alcohol consumption. Field observations revealed that individuals ranging from 15 to 65 years old were seen drinking, with some even passing out on roads or outside hotels after consuming excessive amounts. Many lost consciousness due to heavy drinking. Initially, they tend to start with low-quality alcohol, but as the celebration progresses, they also purchase more expensive whiskey, mixing both types to create potent cocktails. This combination further impairs their judgment and leads to a state of unconsciousness, highlighting the gravity of alcohol misuse among Nepali migrants during festive occasions.

In conclusion, the behaviour of Nepali migrants at border areas, especially the prevalent use of alcohol, is a complex issue influenced by various social, economic, and psychological factors. While alcohol may serve as a temporary coping mechanism for the stresses of migration and reintegration, its excessive consumption leads to numerous negative consequences, both for the migrants themselves and for their families and communities. Through better awareness, support systems, and regulatory interventions, it may be possible to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol consumption among returning migrants. Addressing this issue is crucial not only for the well-being of the migrants but also for the overall social and economic health of the border regions and Nepal as a whole.

Gambling Among Nepali Migrants at Border Areas: Night Stay Activities and Economic Challenges

At border point- Mahendranagar, where the Gaddachowki crossing is located, returning migrants often engage in a range of activities while awaiting transportation to their hometowns. Among these activities, gambling has emerged as a prevalent issue. This practice, often carried out during night stays at border side hotels, can lead to financial instability, family conflicts, and social problems, compounding the challenges faced by migrants upon their return to Nepal.

In this study, it is observed that the behaviour of gambling among Nepali migrants, particularly focusing on those returning from India at the Mahendranagar border. It is examined that the causes behind the popularity of gambling, the economic and social consequences it leads to, and provide real-world examples to illustrate its impact. Through this analysis, the aim to offer insights into how this behaviour exacerbates the financial difficulties of migrants and what potential solutions might mitigate its negative effects.

The Prevalence of Gambling Among Nepali Migrants

Gambling, like alcohol consumption, has deep cultural and social roots in Nepal. It is often associated with festival seasons, particularly during Dashain and Tihar, when card games are played among family and friends. However, among Nepali migrants, gambling takes on a different character, becoming a regular activity during their stays at border hotels in Mahendranagar and other areas.

Why Do Nepali Migrants Gamble?

During the field visit to the study area, it was observed that some Nepali migrants, rather than heading directly to their homes after crossing the Gaddachowki border, involved in gambling activities. These migrants were found carrying a sum of money they had earned while working in India. Many of them explained that they believed they could increase their earnings through gambling, which would allow them to have more money to spend during the upcoming Dashain and Tihar

festivals in Nepal. Their habitual involvement in gambling, coupled with the lure of making easy money, seemed to influence their decisions. When asked about their reasons for engaging in such risky financial behaviour, the migrants provided several explanations. They expressed that the anticipation of winning more money fueled their actions, as they saw gambling as a quick way to improve their financial situation before returning to their families. Additionally, their long-standing habits of gambling, formed over time, made it difficult for them to resist the temptation, especially when they had access to cash and the hope of greater returns.

According to Lan and Kim (2025), the new generation of migrants' places greater emphasis on financial prosperity, security, and societal stability, often adapting to new cultural and national identities rather than maintaining their traditional heritage and ancestral roots. Similar to Lan and Kim study, in case of Nepali labour migrants behavioural pattern reveals a complex mix of financial motivation, cultural factors related to festival spending, and deeply ingrained habits that lead these migrants to take risky decisions, even though the outcomes may not be in their favour. Some of the causes are found as follows:

1. **Uncertainty of Income and Financial Stress:** One of the primary reasons Nepali migrants engage in gambling is the uncertainty of income they face while working in India. Migrants often work in the informal sector, where wages are inconsistent, and job security is minimal. This financial uncertainty drives many migrants to seek quick ways to earn money, and gambling is seen as one such opportunity. The promise of winning a large sum in a short amount of time can be alluring to migrants who may have struggled to save during their time in India. However, gambling rarely leads to financial gain and more often results in loss, leaving migrants in even worse financial condition than before.
2. **Lack of Structured Entertainment Options**
Another factor contributing to the popularity of gambling among migrants is the lack of structured entertainment options at border areas. After crossing the border, many migrants find themselves with little to do while waiting for transportation or resting overnight. This downtime can lead to boredom, and in the absence of positive recreational activities, many turn to gambling as a way to pass the time. In Mahendranagar, where hotels are often filled with returning migrants, gambling can quickly spread as a group activity. Migrants, already in a social setting, may be more likely to participate when they see others engaging in the same behaviour.
3. **Alcohol as a Catalyst for Gambling**
The role of alcohol in facilitating gambling cannot be ignored. As discussed earlier, alcohol consumption is

common among Nepali migrants at the border, particularly in Mahendranagar. Alcohol lowers inhibitions and impairs judgment, making it easier for migrants to take risks, such as betting money they cannot afford to lose. In many cases, migrants begin gambling after consuming alcohol, and the combination of the two behaviours can quickly spiral out of control. Once intoxicated, migrants are more likely to make reckless bets, engage in disputes, and lose track of their financial situation.

Case of Financial Ruin: *A 35-year-old male migrant worker from Doti district, who had spent two years working in the construction sector in Delhi, returned to Nepal during the Dashain festival of the year 2024. After crossing the Gad-dachowki border, he stayed at a hotel in Mahendranagar with a group of fellow returnees. That night, they began gambling, with the man gambling a significant portion of his savings. By the end of the night, he had lost nearly all the money he had earned during his two years in India. The next morning, he found himself without enough money to buy a bus ticket to his home village, let alone provide for his family. His financial ruin not only affected him but also caused tension with his family, who had been expecting financial support. His children had been eagerly awaiting gifts, and his wife had been planning to use his earnings to cover household expenses. The loss of his savings led to family conflict and strained relationships upon his return (On the basis of phone conversation of respondent's family in support of hotel owner at Mahendranagar Nepal).*

Similarly, there is another case found during the field study.

Altercations Leading to Police Involvement: *In another instance, a group of migrants from Achham district staying at a hotel in Mahendranagar got into a dispute during a late-night gambling session. After consuming alcohol, the men began arguing over a game, and the situation quickly escalated into a physical altercation. Hotel staff were forced to call the police, and several migrants were taken into custody. As a result, the migrants missed their bus the next morning and had to spend additional days in Mahendranagar, incurring further expenses. Some of the men had also lost all their money in the gambling session, leaving them unable to afford transportation back home.*

The above cases are representation of the situation of migrants at transit border. This study conducted in Mahendranagar during the Dashain festival revealed that many families had high expectations from the returning migrants. Children, in particular, often look forward to receiving gifts and new clothes from their fathers who work in India. However, in some cases, these expectations are shattered when migrants return home with little or no money, having lost it in gambling at the border. One family in the study reported (phone communication with family) that their father, who had been working as a laborer in India for over a year, returned home empty-

handed after a night of gambling at a Mahendranagar hotel. His children, who had been eagerly awaiting gifts, were devastated, and his wife was left to manage household expenses without the financial support they had been counting on. This led to tensions within the family and long-term financial difficulties.

According to a hotel owner, a key informant, many migrants, particularly from the Dalit community and some from other groups, are frequently involved in alcohol consumption and gambling at the border areas. This behaviour is often linked to their lack of awareness and illiteracy. Despite efforts to educate or guide them, many are resistant to change, preferring to indulge in these activities rather than considering alternative perspectives.

Bhatt (2024) describes the migration pattern between Nepal and India as circular, with most migrants being males aged 15 to 65, particularly between 18 and 40. A key driver of migration in Nepal is the search for employment, especially among marginalized and disadvantaged communities. The frequency of migrants returning home is influenced by the distance they travel. Indian labor migrants, traveling shorter distances, often return home monthly and can participate in festivals. In contrast, Nepali labor migrants, who travel farther, return home less frequently, limiting their participation in family celebrations. The study concludes that the distance to the workplace significantly affects how often labor migrants can be with their families for festive occasions.

According to migrants' family, her husband had old habit to engage in gambling even he stayed at origin or destination. Due to his habit, her family lost social and economic status. According to her, Gambling, while seemingly a short-term diversion, has profound long-term consequences for Nepali migrants and their families. The economic and social impacts of gambling extend beyond the immediate losses incurred during a single night of betting; they can affect the entire process of reintegration and adjustment once migrants return to their communities. According to some studies, some migrants are found missing in Indian cities due to their engagement in similar habits, such as excessive alcohol consumption and gambling, even after reaching their destination. These behaviours, often rooted in a lack of awareness and education, make them more vulnerable to exploitation, disorientation, and isolation in unfamiliar urban environments. Without proper guidance or support networks, they may lose contact with their families, become involved in risky situations, or move frequently between locations, leading to their eventual disappearance. Such habits not only affect their safety but also hinder their ability to sustain stable employment and a secure livelihood. Most missing migrants are from marginalized communities, with illiteracy being a major factor. Many lack knowledge about their destination, job, or wages, and frequently change jobs and locations without informing their families. The families of missing migrants, often from poor backgrounds, face

economic hardship, relying on low-paying labor or agriculture. The Dalit community is particularly vulnerable, with poorer health and economic conditions compared to others. The study calls for government support for missing migrants' families and better management of migration.

Like the case of Nepal-India border, there is similar challenges and situations in international borders too. Ander et al. (2024) studies a qualitative study of 12 males from Afghanistan, the Middle East, and North Africa living in Sweden found that factors like acculturation and cultural views on money may contribute to problem gambling. According to them, problem gambling is a public health issue affecting individuals, families, and society. Although foreign-born individuals typically gamble less, they are overrepresented among those with problem gambling. In their home countries, gambling is more stigmatized, and family plays a larger role in recovery compared to the general population. These findings can inform prevention and treatment programs for migrants (Anders et al. 2024).

Similarly, Colby et al. (2022) highlights that problem gambling impacts individuals and communities worldwide, including immigrant Asian Americans, who are frequently underrepresented in major studies. This lack of data has resulted in insufficient culturally specific services and has reinforced the harmful stereotype of the "Asian gambler," which fuels anti-Asian racism while ignoring the underlying causes of problem gambling. In a study by Sobrun-Maharaj, Rossen, and Wong (2013), the impact of gambling on the health and wellbeing of Asian families in New Zealand, across five major ethnic subgroups, was explored. The study emphasized how settlement challenges and coping mechanisms contribute to problem gambling and suggested strategies to strengthen resilience, such as cultural education, fostering trust, and encouraging help-seeking behaviours.

The 1975 ILO Convention aimed to regulate labor migration by addressing trafficking and exploitation rather than broad migrant rights. By the 1970s, labor-exporting countries criticized migration's negative effects, while importers-imposed recruitment bans, shifting ILO's focus to managing uncontrolled migration. Limited ratification underscored governance challenges. These historical patterns resonate with contemporary cross-border migration, as seen at the Nepal-India border, where restrictive policies push migrants toward informal networks, increasing their vulnerability. Understanding these behavioral shifts through the Convention's framework highlights persistent challenges in migration governance (Paoli, 2025).

Compared to international migration across borders, the behaviour of migrants at the Nepal-India border differs due to the unique cultural ties and historical migration patterns between the two countries. Nepalis have migrated to India since ancient times and enjoy open access to job opportunities there. Many views Indian territory as accessible to both Indians and

Nepalis, though some experience harassment, often due to strenuous labor or conditions akin to bonded labor. Upon returning to Nepal, especially during festivals, they experience a sense of relief and happiness, which leads to heightened excitement. This festive mood often results in excessive drinking and gambling, as they feel safe within their homeland. During field studies, many migrants were observed indulging in alcohol, forgetting their challenges and spending extravagantly on gambling or unnecessary purchases.

Impact of Gambling in Migrants' and their Family

During the field study, it is found that there are lots of impacts due to migrants' behaviours. The major impacts are described as:

1. Loss of Savings

The most immediate and obvious consequence of gambling is the loss of savings. Many Nepali migrants work in low-wage, informal sectors in India, and their ability to save money is often limited by high living expenses and the precarious nature of their jobs. For those who manage to save a portion of their earnings, gambling can quickly deplete their financial reserves. The loss of savings not only affects the migrants themselves but also their families, who rely on remittances for basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare. When migrants return home without money, their families face financial hardships that can last long after the initial gambling losses have occurred.

2. Increased Debt

In some cases, migrants who lose money through gambling may turn to borrowing in order to cover their travel expenses or provide for their families. This can lead to a cycle of debt, as migrants struggle to repay loans with limited income. The high-interest rates charged by informal lenders can exacerbate the financial burden, leaving migrants and their families in a precarious economic situation.

3. Missed Opportunities for Investment

Money that is lost through gambling could otherwise be used for productive investments in the migrant's home community. For example, many migrants return to Nepal with plans to start small businesses, invest in agriculture, or improve their family's living conditions. However, when those funds are lost in gambling, these opportunities are missed, and the economic potential of migration is diminished.

Social and Emotional Consequences

1. Family Conflicts

The financial instability caused by gambling often leads to conflicts within families. Migrants who return home empty-handed after gambling away their savings may face anger and disappointment from their spouses and children. These conflicts can strain family relationships and make it difficult for migrants to reintegrate into their communities.

In some cases, the emotional toll of returning home without

meeting family expectations can lead to feelings of shame and guilt among migrants. This can further exacerbate mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, which are already prevalent among migrant workers due to the stresses of working abroad.

2. Community Disapproval

In rural Nepali communities, where social ties are strong, the behaviour of individuals reflects on their entire family. Migrants who engage in gambling and other negative behaviours at the border may face disapproval from their communities, particularly if their actions lead to public altercations or legal troubles. This social stigma can make it difficult for migrants to reintegrate and rebuild their lives after returning from India.

3. Impact on Children

The financial losses caused by gambling have a direct impact on the children of migrant workers. When parents return home without money, children may be forced to go without basic necessities such as food, clothing, and education. In addition, the emotional impact of unmet expectations can lead to feelings of disappointment and resentment among children, further straining family relationships.

Potential Solutions and Interventions

Addressing the issue of alcohol consumption and gambling among Nepali migrants requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account both the immediate triggers of gambling behaviour and the broader social and economic challenges faced by migrants.

1. Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns aimed at educating migrants about the dangers of gambling could help reduce its prevalence at border areas. These campaigns could be conducted through media channels that are accessible to migrants, such as radio, television, and social media. In addition, informational materials could be distributed at border points and hotels where migrants are known to stay.

2. Structured Entertainment Options

One way to reduce the appeal of gambling is to provide migrants with alternative forms of entertainment during their night stays at border hotels. Local governments and NGOs could organize cultural programs, sports activities, or other recreational events that offer migrants a positive way to pass the time without resorting to gambling.

a. Financial Literacy Programs

Providing migrants with financial literacy training before they depart for India could help them manage their earnings more effectively and avoid the temptation to gamble. These programs could teach migrants how to budget, save, and invest their money, as well as how to avoid high-risk behaviours such as gambling.

b. Stricter Regulation of Gambling and Alcohol Sales

Local governments in border areas like Mahendranagar could implement stricter regulations on gambling and alcohol sales,

particularly during peak migration periods such as festivals. By limiting access to these activities, authorities could help curb the negative behaviours that contribute to financial instability among migrants.

5. Conclusions

This qualitative study provides a comprehensive understanding of the behavioural landscape of Nepalese labor migrants at the Mahendranagar border. By focusing on socio-cultural practices such as alcohol consumption and gambling, the study sheds light on the underlying factors that drive these behaviours. The findings underscore the need for a holistic approach to address the challenges faced by migrants, one that considers both the individual and structural dimensions of their experiences.

Alcoholic and Gambling among Nepali migrants at border areas, particularly in Mahendranagar, is a widespread issue that has significant economic and social consequences. While gambling may provide a temporary distraction for migrants, it often leads to financial ruin, family conflicts, and long-term difficulties in reintegration. By addressing the root causes of gambling behaviour, such as financial stress and the lack of structured entertainment options, it may be possible to mitigate its negative effects and improve the well-being of Nepali migrants and their families.

The behaviours observed among Nepalese migrants in Mahendranagar are not merely individual choices but are shaped by structural factors, such as economic insecurity, lack of social support, and limited access to information. The study also underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges faced by migrants. Awareness campaigns, financial literacy programs, and community support initiatives could help mitigate the negative impacts of these socio-cultural practices.

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