

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	What is the prevalence of and associations with forced labour experiences among male migrants from Dolakha, Nepal? Findings from a cross-sectional study of returnee migrants.
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Mak, Joelle; Abramsky, Tanya; Sijapati, Bandita; Kiss, Ligia; Zimmerman, Cathy

### VERSION 1 - REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Pilar Bas Sarmiento University of Cadiz Spain
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	13-Feb-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>This is an interesting, necessary, current and under-treated topic. The methodology is according to the study design. Although the sample finally used for the statistical analysis is reduced and comprises only returnees, showing wide confidence intervals, does not detract.</p> <p>Abstract: I would clear the objective; I think it would have been more correct to talk about prevalence of the experiences of forced/labor exploitation rather than prevalence and experiences; the conjunction may result misleading. Taking into account the STROBE Statement recommendations, I would include the statistical analysis used and, especially, I would change the conclusions of the summary, focusing on what is extracted from the results and possible implications.</p> <p>Introduction: The authors note that there are gaps in the evidence, with few rigorous studies on the matter but no reference is made. If the word limit requirement allows, it would be interesting to the reader to know the position of the authors regarding the differences between forced labor, labor exploitation, trafficking and slavery. At the end of the introduction states that the article describes experiences of labor migration; this statement confuses and suggests in a more qualitative orientation study.</p> <p>Methods: The process of data collection should be specified in detail: who and how is done. Any quality control for data collection was established?. In recruiting participants, should clarify the "not found" and if there was someone who did not want to participate in order to differentiate between lack of accuracy of estimates and estimation bias. In the flow diagram may be appropriate to specify the available data for analysis (n = 140)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To specify measures taken in response to potential sources of bias.</li> <li>- To explain how missing data were addressed; to give reasons for</li> </ul>
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	<p>missing data, if some participant was excluded because of missing data...</p> <p>- The fact that the prevalence data are only from men who returned from his recent migration can generate an estimation bias both underestimating -as the authors acknowledge in the limitations- (e.g. those subjected to Kafala system) as overestimating the prevalence (it may be more likely to return those who do not fulfill their expectations).</p> <p>Results: The subsections allow easily to follow the thread. The number of participants in each phase of the study is indicated but it would be useful to clarify the reasons for the subject loss.</p> <p>Discussion: It is well structured. A brief synopsis of the key results and its possible explanations, limitations and implications is carried out.</p> <p>I missed the comparison with relevant results of other published studies and it would have been useful to suggest ways to improve future research.</p> <p>Although you point it as a hypothesis, could not be over-interpreted when you mean that: "the results indicate that previous experience of labor migration may not be as protective of future forced labor experiences", considering that those with previous experience had less prevalence of forced labor. In this sense, the experience could make them to declare more for being aware of their rights and realise of their forced situation and/or having different expectations than those who are for the first time.</p> <p>At the end of the discussion, the following sentence should be clear, it makes no sense: "somewhat surprisingly, men who reported that they were aware of the possibility of agreement breaches had a slightly higher prevalence of forced labor than those who reported being aware". You should rather mean aware vs. non-aware.</p> <p>Limitations and conclusions are clear and consistent. If there are few studies, with little methodological rigor, it would be interesting to compare your study with others in terms of validity, generalization and precision, in order to acquire an even more worthy contribution.</p> <p>English is not my first language, I do not feel confident enough to evaluate the translation.</p> <p>Nowadays it is a pleasure to review a study that gives voice to the immigrants, congratulations.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Wen Chen School of Public Health, Sun Yat-sen University, China
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	22-Feb-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>Overall the manuscript is an interesting work and an important topic to study, especially in the current climate of increased numbers of international migrants. I have few comments/questions.</p> <p>What was the reason for choosing only one district out of five study districts in the SWIFT?</p> <p>Forced labour was assessed among those who returned within the past 10 years, which is a long period. Migrants returned 10 years</p>
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	<p>ago may have very different working experience compared to these just returned recently due to changes in socio-economic environment. Therefore, my question is: would the prevalence of forced labour be relevant to include the year of migration or return.</p> <p>The description on data analysis strategy was not very clear to me. Are estimators of the association (prevalence ratios) reported in Table 5 adjusted for any confounding factors? It would be useful to further clarify this issue, and might be nice to do that as adjusted estimators.</p> <p>Finally, I feel there is lack of depth in the discussion, while some good points are discussed, especially around the strategies to guide practice and address forced labour issues in Nepal and other countries in the world experiencing similar issues.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	AjayBailey Assistant Professor, Population Research Centre, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	13-Mar-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The paper is very interesting and requires more embedding in the literature on forced labour, family contexts and various push factors for migration.</p> <p>In the discussion the authors could explain more the contribution of their study in relation to other studies.</p>
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Reviewer Name: Pilar Bas Sarmiento

Institution and Country: University of Cadiz, Spain Please state any competing interests: None declared

Please leave your comments for the authors below

This is an interesting, necessary, current and under-treated topic. The methodology is according to the study design. Although the sample finally used for the statistical analysis is reduced and comprises only returnees, showing wide confidence intervals, does not detract.

Abstract: I would clear the objective; I think it would have been more correct to talk about prevalence of the experiences of forced/labor exploitation rather than prevalence and experiences; the conjunction may result misleading. Taking into account the STROBE Statement recommendations, I would include the statistical analysis used and, especially, I would change the conclusions of the summary, focusing on what is extracted from the results and possible implications.

-The last line in the objective of the abstract now reads '...data on the prevalence of forced labour experiences...'

-The statement 'Bivariate analysis and log-binomial regression were used to analyse the data with Chi-squared or Fisher's Exact tests of association.' has been added to the methods section to clarify the statistical analysis used.

-The conclusion has also been rephrased to the following:

'The fact that large numbers of Nepali labour migrants experienced forced labour across a variety of destinations and work sectors indicate the widespread nature of migration- and labour-related abuses. Until there are greater shifts in the structural factors that underpin these exploitations, migrant workers need better advice and guidance on how to assess recruitment agencies and brokers, and how to access services at destinations. Interventions need to consider the potential restrictive realities of migrant workers. Simultaneously, states that employ migrant workforce need to become more aware of and establish measures to prevent and punish the tactics used to exploit workers. Further research should disaggregate exploitative experiences by sector as well as assess the strength and direction of the associated factors, accounting for confounders and mediators. As labour migration from Nepal is not likely to reduce in the near future, interventions need to better address the challenges prospective migrants face and help them achieve safer migration and health outcomes.'

Introduction: The authors note that there are gaps in the evidence, with few rigorous studies on the matter but no reference is made. If the word limit requirement allows, it would be interesting to the reader to know the position of the authors regarding the differences between forced labor, labor exploitation, trafficking and slavery.

-Thank you for pointing out our references were misplaced. This has now been corrected and additional references added.

-Unfortunately, due to word limits we are unable to elaborate on our own views of the definitional issues. However, we have added a number of references that contribute to this debate and have added a sentence at the end of the introduction that explains why 'forced labour' specifically was used in this analysis.

At the end of the introduction states that the article describes experiences of labor migration; this statement confuses and suggests in a more qualitative orientation study.

-This has now been revised to say 'reports'

Methods: The process of data collection should be specified in detail: who and how is done. Any quality control for data collection was established?. In recruiting participants, should clarify the "not found" and if there was someone who did not want to participate in order to differentiate between lack of accuracy of estimates and estimation bias. In the flow diagram may be appropriate to specify the available data for analysis (n = 140)

-We have now provided further details on how men were visited with the following statement:

'In November 2014 we returned to locate and invite all returnee migrants to take part in the study by re-visiting those homes. Up to three visits were conducted on different days and times to locate men, including making queries to the neighbours, in the case where the house appears to be unoccupied.'

We have also added the statement below to clarify quality control issues with data collection:

'A meeting was held with the fieldwork team each night to discuss any issues as well as record any data that needs correcting as the data collection application does not allow moving back after certain sections.'

We have updated the flow chart to indicate refusals and the sample available for the descriptive and the forced labour specific analyses.

To specify measures taken in response to potential sources of bias.

-A statement has been added to clarify how the forced labour dimensions were constructed:

Indicators were constructed from a group of variables (questions) asked in the survey, in order to reduce bias as individuals may define exploitation and forced labour differently than the ILO measure.

To explain how missing data were addressed; to give reasons for missing data, if some participant was excluded because of missing data...

-No respondent was excluded from analysis due to missing data. We have clarified the issue of missing data: 'Most questions on the survey included a 'not applicable' option and the programming was done to require a response to most questions to avoid missing data.'

The fact that the prevalence data are only from men who returned from his recent migration can generate an estimation bias both underestimating -as the authors acknowledge in the limitations- (e.g. those subjected to Kafala system) as overestimating the prevalence (it may be more likely to return those who do not fulfill their expectations).

-Thank you for this input. It is true that our prevalence estimate could be both an under- or over-estimate. We have clarified this in the limitations. The second last paragraph of that section now reads:

'The forced labour measure itself is likely to not capture the true prevalence as those who have not returned to Nepal may range from those who have done well and continue their stay to those who have experienced the worst forms of exploitation and could not make it back. The latter has been highlighted by the increasing numbers of migrant worker fatalities at destination. Additionally those who do return to their village of origins and are included in our study are likely to be different from those who relocated to another part of Nepal.'

Results: The subsections allow easily to follow the thread.

The number of participants in each phase of the study is indicated but it would be useful to clarify the reasons for the subject loss.

-This has now been clarified in the data analysis section, the revised statements now reads:

'Prevalence of the three dimensions of forced labour and forced labour itself were calculated only among men who returned from their most recent migration within the past 10 years (n=140) as these individuals had completed the longer, full survey and could be used in the analysis for forced labour experiences. Men who had returned from their most recent migration ten or more years ago completed a shorter survey which did not have sufficient data to determine forced labour.'

Discussion: It is well structured. A brief synopsis of the key results and its possible explanations, limitations and implications is carried out.

I missed the comparison with relevant results of other published studies and it would have been useful to suggest ways to improve future research.

-We have revised the first section of the discussion to compare our findings with other studies on trafficking for labour exploitation among Nepali migrants as well as added some points for future research to consider in order to advance the field further.

Although you point it as a hypothesis, could not be over-interpreted when you mean that: "the results indicate that previous experience of labor migration may not be as protective of future forced labor experiences", considering that those with previous experience had less prevalence of forced labor. In this sense, the experience could make them to declare more for being aware of their rights and realise of their forced situation and/or having different expectations than those who are for the first time.

-It is true that men's previous experience may affect how they view and report their subsequent experiences. We have used a large number of variables relating to specific experiences to determine more objective experiences of forced labour. We have added the statement below to clarify this issue: 'Previous migration may have shaped men's views on the process and how they assess their experiences which may have impacted how they responded to certain questions. Although forced labour was determined using a large number of questions on their actual experiences, rather than perceptions, this should not have altered the results too much.'

At the end of the discussion, the following sentence should be clear, it makes no sense: "somewhat surprisingly, men who reported that they were aware of the possibility of agreement breaches had a slightly higher prevalence of forced labor than those who reported being aware". You should rather mean aware vs. non-aware.

-Thank you for pointing out this mistake. It has now been corrected with 'unaware'.

Limitations and conclusions are clear and consistent. If there are few studies, with little methodological rigor, it would be interesting to compare your study with others in terms of validity, generalization and precision, in order to acquire an even more worthy contribution.

-In our addition of comparison to other studies (at the beginning of the discussion section) we have highlighted the other studies and the methodological differences which we hope addresses this point as well.

English is not my first language, I do not feel confident enough to evaluate the translation.

Nowadays it is a pleasure to review a study that gives voice to the immigrants, congratulations.

Reviewer: 2

Reviewer Name: Wen Chen

Institution and Country: School of Public Health, Sun Yat-sen University, China Please state any competing interests: None declared

Please leave your comments for the authors below

Overall the manuscript is an interesting work and an important topic to study, especially in the current climate of increased numbers of international migrants. I have few comments/questions.

What was the reason for choosing only one district out of five study districts in the SWiFT?

-This study site was selected by ILO who lead the intervention. It was conducted as a formative study, which was aimed at estimating the prevalence of labour migration and forced labour in order to inform our later work in the other study sites. Subsequent research was conducted in another 3 SWiFT sites and one was excluded due to a delay in selected an implementation partner. We have clarified this in the text with the following statement: 'The intervention runs in five districts in Nepal, for which one, Dolakha, was selected for this formative study.'

Forced labour was assessed among those who returned within the past 10 years, which is a long period. Migrants returned 10 years ago may have very different working experience compared to these just returned recently due to changes in socio-economic environment. Therefore, my question is: would the prevalence of forced labour be relevant to include the year of migration or return.

-We have now added this analysis to the forced labour analysis and is shown in Table 5.

The description on data analysis strategy was not very clear to me. Are estimators of the association (prevalence ratios) reported in Table 5 adjusted for any confounding factors? It would be useful to further clarify this issue, and might be nice to do that as adjusted estimators.

-The original aim was to estimate the associations adjusting for covariates (including confounders). However, due to the small overall sample, resulting in small within strata samples, the numbers became too small to produce meaningful adjusted prevalence ratios as the confidence intervals were extremely wide. In order not to produce misleading figures we opted to keep the analysis crude, as an exploratory analysis.



Finally, I feel there is lack of depth in the discussion, while some good points are discussed, especially around the strategies to guide practice and address forced labour issues in Nepal and other countries in the world experiencing similar issues.

-As this point was also raised by the first review we include the same responses here: We have revised the first section of the discussion to compare our findings with other studies on trafficking for labour exploitation among Nepali migrants as well as added some points for future research to consider in order to advance the field further.

Reviewer: 3

Reviewer Name: Ajay Bailey

Institution and Country: Assistant Professor, Population Research Centre, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands Please state any competing interests: None declared

Please leave your comments for the authors below

The paper is very interesting and requires more embedding in the literature on forced labour, family contexts and various push factors for migration.

-We have revised the setting section of the manuscript to highlight the literature on the factors relating to migration in Nepal. However due to word limits we are unable to expand on these issues much further.

In the discussion the authors could explain more the contribution of their study in relation to other studies.

-As this point was also raised by the first review we include the same responses here: We have revised the first section of the discussion to compare our findings with other studies on trafficking for labour exploitation among Nepali migrants as well as added some points for future research to consider in order to advance the field further.

We hope we have adequately addressed all the comments raised and hope that the revised manuscript is acceptable for publication in BMJ Open.

## VERSION 2 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Pilar Bas Sarmiento University of Cadiz.Spain
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	12-May-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	I believe that the changes introduced have improved the quality of the manuscript. Congratulations.
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