

Discrimination Against Nonworkers in Nepal: Perceived Socio-Political, Economic, and Psychological Impacts

Ananta Aryal 

Department of Sociology, Madan Bhandari Memorial College

Article Info.	Abstract
<p>Article History Received: January 12, 2025 Accepted: March 28, 2025</p> <p>Email aryalfour@gmail.com</p> <p>Cite Aryal, A. (2025). Discrimination against nonworkers in Nepal: Perceived socio-political, economic, and psychological impacts. <i>Journal of Productive Discourse</i>, 3(1), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.3126/prod.v3i1.78453</p>	<p>This qualitative study examines the socio-political, economic, and psychological impacts of discrimination faced by nonworkers in Nepal. Based on 26 in-depth interviews and using thematic and narrative analysis, the research finds that unemployment in Nepal is not merely an economic issue but a deeply social experience shaped by stigma, inequality, and exclusion. Nonworkers face layered discrimination from families, communities, and institutions. Within families, they experience unequal emotional and financial support, rooted in cultural beliefs that link personal worth to employment. In their communities, they are often viewed as burdens, leading to isolation and low self-esteem. At the institutional level, state policies largely ignore the needs of the unemployed, denying them access to essential services such as healthcare, social security, and vocational training. Economic challenges are worsened by nepotism and favoritism in recruitment, limiting fair employment opportunities. Many nonworkers survive by borrowing money, relying on family support, or selling personal belongings. Socio-politically, nonworkers are excluded from public discourse and policy development, and increasing divisions between employed and unemployed individuals threaten social unity. Psychologically, participants reported high levels of distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Gender-based exploitation during job-seeking, particularly affecting women, emerged as a serious concern. The study calls for urgent policy reforms to ensure fair access to education and employment and to shift societal attitudes about unemployment. Addressing the structural, socio-political, economic, and psychological burdens of nonworkers is crucial to promoting dignity, mental health, and social integration in Nepali society.</p> <p>Keywords: antagonism, discrimination, impact, nonworkers, unemployment</p>

Introduction

Unemployment is a globally persistent issue that extends beyond financial insecurity to encompass profound social and psychological consequences. Individuals without access to employment—referred to as nonworkers in this study—frequently

encounter systemic exclusion, diminished self-worth, and restricted social participation. In many societies, employment is closely tied to personal identity, dignity, and social recognition. As such, the absence of work is not merely a lack of income but a condition that often leads to stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization.

The global distribution of wealth and income continues to reflect widening inequality. According to [Chancel et al. \(2022\)](#), the top 1% of the global population has captured 98% of wealth generated since the mid-1990s, while the bottom 50% accounts for just 2%. As of 2023, approximately 402 million people remain unemployed worldwide, and labor force participation rates have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels ([ILO STAT, 2024](#)). Structural inequalities are particularly acute in developing economies, where informal labor markets dominate and state support systems are underdeveloped. In such contexts, unemployment not only exposes individuals to financial hardship but also to social precarity and exclusion from public life.

In Nepal, unemployment stands at an estimated 11% ([Central Bureau of Statistics \[CBS\], 2019](#)). Yet the issue extends beyond statistics. Nonworkers often experience multifaceted discrimination—characterized by financial instability, social isolation, verbal abuse, and emotional distress. Long-term unemployment is closely linked to mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem ([Paul & Moser, 2009](#); [Clark et al., 2001](#)). Despite these consequences, existing literature and policy discourse remain disproportionately focused on the employed population, often overlooking the lived realities of those excluded from the labor market ([ILO, 2019](#); [OECD, 2021](#); [World Bank, 2020](#); [UNDP, 2022](#)).

This study explores the lived experiences of discrimination among nonworkers in Nepal, with a particular focus on the socio-political, economic, and psychological effects of unemployment. By investigating these dimensions, it aims to offer a more holistic understanding of how joblessness affects individuals in a society where employment is closely tied to social legitimacy, dignity, and value.

Unemployment is frequently accompanied by stigma, which negatively influences both self-perception and social relationships. Drawing on [Goffman's \(1963\)](#) theory of stigma, this study recognizes that nonworkers often internalize

dominant narratives portraying them as lazy, incompetent, or undeserving. This internalization intensifies psychological distress and may discourage job-seeking behavior. [Gurr et al. \(2019\)](#) found that stigma consciousness among unemployed individuals significantly increases anxiety and emotional withdrawal. [Solga \(2002\)](#) further highlights that employment gaps are often interpreted by employers as signs of reduced productivity, thereby undermining chances for re-entry into the labor force.

From a critical political-economic perspective, [Marx \(1867\)](#) argues that nonworkers, lacking both ownership of production and the ability to sell labor, are systematically excluded and rendered economically powerless. They function as a surplus labor reserve, mobilized only under favorable economic conditions. [Weber \(1922/1978\)](#), in his theory of social stratification, emphasizes that access to economic resources directly influences life chances and social positioning. Empirical studies support these theoretical perspectives, showing that unemployed individuals often experience exclusion, diminished self-esteem, and persistent social judgment ([Gurr & Jungbauer-Gans, 2013](#); [Voldby et al., 2022](#)).

While classical theories of class and labor ([Wright, 1985, 2005](#); [Marx & Engels, 1848](#); [Breen, 2005](#); [Weeden et al., 2007](#); [Weininger, 2005](#); [Pakulski, 2005](#)) provide important frameworks for understanding these dynamics, contemporary realities—shaped by globalization, informal economies, and technological advancement—remain underexplored in relation to nonworkers. Millions of people around the world, including in Nepal, are excluded from stable employment and formal labor protections, yet their shared experiences of poverty, stigma, and marginalization point to the emergence of a distinct and underrecognized social group.

This study addresses a critical gap by focusing on nonworkers' lived experiences of exclusion, inequality, and structural neglect in Nepal. By examining how socio-political systems, economic structures, and cultural narratives collectively shape the lives of unemployed individuals, the

research contributes to a deeper understanding of how labor market exclusion reinforces broader patterns of social inequality. The findings aim to inform policy reforms and cultural transformations that recognize the dignity of individuals beyond employment status and promote inclusive social and economic participation. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how nonworkers experience discrimination and how it affects their psychological well-being, economic circumstances, and socio-political inclusion.

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following general and specific objectives:

General Objective

To explore the lived experiences of unemployment-related discrimination and its perceived socio-political, economic, and psychological impacts among nonworkers.

Specific Objectives

- To explore how nonworkers perceive and experience the socio-political consequences of unemployment.
- To understand how nonworkers experience and interpret the economic challenges associated with unemployment.
- To examine the psychological effects of unemployment as perceived and experienced by nonworkers.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, integrating thematic analysis (TA) and narrative analysis to examine experiences of unemployment-related discrimination among nonworkers within their socio-cultural contexts. Thematic analysis was used to systematically identify and interpret recurring patterns in the data through coding and categorization, yielding both descriptive and interpretive insights. Narrative analysis complemented TA by focusing on participants' lived experiences, helping to reveal deeper economic, political, psychological, and social dimensions shaped by societal norms and power structures.

Data were collected from three diverse locations in Nepal—Kathmandu Metropolitan City (Wards 5 and 29), Panchakanya Rural Municipality, and Shivapuri Rural Municipality in Nuwakot District—to ensure representation from both urban and rural contexts. Participants were drawn from the 2022–2023 registry of the Prime Minister Employment Program (PMEP), which included 815 from Kathmandu, 350 from Panchakanya, and 369 from Shivapuri—the highest registrations in the respective areas.

The information saturation method was applied based on Charmaz's (2006) principle. A purposive-quota sampling strategy ensured demographic diversity across four groups: rural males (RRM), urban males (URM), rural females (RRF), and urban females (URF). A total of 26 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted: 7 RRM, 7 URM, 6 RRF, and 6 URF. Participants met the ILO's (1982) unemployment criteria—being without work, available for work, and actively seeking employment—as well as additional criteria: aged 18–59, unemployed for over six months, and residing in the study area for at least five years.

Interviews were conducted in private settings at the convenience of the participants. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated into English. Translations were reviewed by experts to ensure accuracy. Data were analyzed using a line-by-line open coding process, followed by focused coding to consolidate categories. MAXQDA software was used to manage data and extract key themes.

Research Rigor

To ensure credibility, interview guidelines were refined based on feedback from supervisors and field researchers, enhancing clarity and reducing bias. Data interpretation was grounded in participants' contexts to maintain objectivity. Codes and emerging themes were systematically aligned with the research objectives to authentically represent participants' perspectives. Member checking was conducted by sharing key interpretations with participants to confirm

the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. Dependability and confirmability were supported by detailed documentation of interview procedures, coding strategies, and analytical decisions, establishing a transparent audit trail. Repeated coding cycles and collaborative discussions among researchers strengthened intercoder agreement and ensured analytical consistency and reflexivity throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study engaged a total of 26 participants—14 males and 12 females. Their ages ranged from 20 to 34 years. Regarding marital status, 9 participants were married, while the majority (17) were unmarried. In terms of ethnicity, 15 respondents identified as Brahmin/Kshatriya. Educational attainment was uniformly high: all participants had at least completed high school. Specifically, 14 held bachelor's degrees, 9 had completed master's degrees, and 3 were high school graduates.

Experience of Discrimination

Participants described complex and intersecting forms of discrimination across various dimensions of daily life—within interactions with the state, society, family, and employed individuals (the working class). These discriminatory practices not only shaped their material conditions but also had profound impacts on their psychological well-being, social identity, and sense of belonging. Notably, these narratives reveal that discrimination against nonworkers is embedded both in institutional structures and everyday social interactions.

Discrimination by the State

Respondents frequently reported systemic exclusion by state institutions. Many observed that government benefits—such as pensions, healthcare, education, and social security—are primarily targeted at formally employed individuals, effectively excluding nonworkers from essential services. As RRM01 remarked, “The government provides a bulk of facilities

to employed individuals... They can send their children to good schools and colleges and have access to better health facilities.” This highlights a structural gap in welfare distribution, where employment status determines access to basic rights.

Beyond exclusion from benefits, participants criticized the absence of state policies that address the needs of nonworkers. RRF01 pointed out that programs like entrepreneurship and welfare schemes are often inaccessible or poorly managed, especially for those lacking political connections. These challenges are compounded by corruption and misgovernance at the local level. For instance, RRM04 shared that agricultural tools meant for marginalized groups were redirected to powerful individuals. Such cases reflect a systemic pattern where state resources are disproportionately captured by the privileged, deepening the exclusion of the unemployed.

Financial institutions were also perceived as reinforcing discrimination. Nonworkers often lack the formal proof of employment needed to access banking or loan services. URM04 described being denied a loan despite having a viable business plan, simply due to the absence of a steady income. With no unemployment benefits, subsidies, or financial support available, nonworkers remain locked out of economic opportunities. These experiences collectively depict a state apparatus that prioritizes the formally employed while systematically neglecting those without work.

Discrimination by Society

Participants also reported widespread societal exclusion extending from public spaces to private interactions. Their accounts revealed that employment status significantly influences social value and community participation. RRF01 noted, “They are not included in decision-making. Their voices aren't heard. Their presence isn't acknowledged.” This lack of recognition underscores how social worth is frequently linked to economic contribution.

Opportunities for involvement in local committees, charity groups, and development projects were often informally reserved for those with jobs or financial means. URM04 shared that a road construction project was rerouted away from their home because they couldn't contribute financially. Employment was consistently associated with competence and legitimacy, while nonworkers were perceived as incapable or "useless." URM03 mentioned that unemployed individuals were often excluded from cooperatives and community programs, reinforcing a culture of inequality.

Participants also highlighted that societal elites frequently perpetuate discriminatory attitudes. URM06 reflected, "They feel like they are running our lives... as if we live on their mercy." This comment points to a broader cultural mindset in which dependency is stigmatized and independence is equated with human worth. Financial stability significantly influenced social treatment, as illustrated by RRM06, who shared that even shopkeepers began treating their family differently once their financial situation declined.

Vocational training and employment initiatives were often seen to benefit women or those with political and social connections, thereby excluding young men and deepening age-based and gendered inequalities. This selective inclusion fosters competition among marginalized groups and perpetuates disparities within the broader unemployment experience.

Discrimination by Family

Contrary to expectations of familial support, many participants described experiencing discrimination within their own households. Families often differentiate between employed and unemployed members in both overt and subtle ways. RRF03 stated bluntly, "Discrimination happens in our own family." She described how her parents eagerly supported her employed brother's business ideas but were hesitant to assist her with basic expenses due to her unemployment. This asymmetrical support was echoed by others.

URF04 similarly remarked, "Families differentiate between those who earn and those who don't in every aspect, even with their children." Nonworkers often feel alienated within their own homes, where respect and emotional care are distributed based on earning capacity. Over time, such treatment fosters internalized feelings of inferiority and emotional exhaustion.

Families also enforce social expectations that intensify psychological stress. URM06 described how tolerance for unemployment has limits: "They say, 'How long will you stay like this? When will you become something?'" Such pressure erodes confidence and well-being, particularly when job opportunities are scarce or inaccessible. RRM06 noted that even in wealthier households where finances were not a concern, nonworkers were still treated with suspicion and given limited autonomy.

Favoritism based on employment status results in hierarchical family dynamics. URF06 explained that working members are shown greater respect and considered responsible, while nonworkers are labeled lazy or burdensome. When nonworkers pursue entrepreneurial efforts and fail, they are often met with blame rather than encouragement. These family behaviors reflect and reinforce broader societal norms that equate employment with personal worth.

Discrimination by Working-Class Individuals

Participants also recounted being marginalized by their employed peers. Employment often became a marker of superiority, fostering status hierarchies even within the same socio-economic group. RRM02 observed that once a friend secured a job, their behavior changed noticeably, treating him as inferior. This shift in peer relationships illustrates how deeply internalized employment-based status can be.

Participants described taunts and belittling comments from both peers and family members. RRF03 shared, "My brother said, 'What do you care about life anyway? You're living the easy life, eating and sleeping.'" Such remarks not only hurt emotionally but serve to normalize discrimination and emotional abuse. URF01 noted that these

attitudes were common—even institutionalized—within community groups and workplaces.

Discriminatory behavior by the working class was frequently tied to power—political, economic, or social. URM04 noted that employed individuals dominate both public and private interactions, often silencing or ignoring nonworkers. Educational and employment status were seen as central to social standing. As URM03 stated, “Education and employment decide your place in society.”

Several participants described feeling deliberately excluded by working peers. RRF02 said, “If I don’t work, I’m excluded from my working friends’ group... Even at home, they don’t seek much advice or consultation from me.” URM01 recalled being left out of social events: “During events, some friends intentionally do not invite.” These experiences reinforced feelings of invisibility and marginalization. URM05 noted, “If you don’t have money, you can’t get treatment... I was unable to pay the bills, so I asked for a quick discharge.” Similarly, URM01 reported being denied financial support due to a lack of trust: “When I ask for money to invest or even for help, no one believes me.”

Access to opportunities and information was often selectively withheld. URM07 noted a growing trend of gatekeeping: “Nowadays, there’s a trend of hiring specialists for everything. Those without experience hardly get opportunities... If there’s any beneficial scheme or information, they (working people) don’t share it.” This exclusion from knowledge networks further entrenches systemic barriers to progress.

The most severe forms of discrimination involved exploitation and abuse, often stemming from power imbalances. Female participants described instances of sexual coercion in job-seeking contexts. URF01 recounted how a government official offered a job recommendation in exchange for sexual favors. RRF02 shared that a friend endured workplace harassment to avoid losing her job. These accounts highlight the intersection of gender-based vulnerability and economic desperation.

Verbal abuse by working family members was also reported as a form of violence. URM04 described being mocked during family gatherings for being unemployed, reinforcing emotional distress and stigma. Nonworkers were frequently exploited under the assumption that their time had no value. URM07 mentioned being asked to run errands or handle administrative tasks—such as certificate renewals—without compensation. RRF03 recounted being asked to manage a family shop, reflecting the undervaluation of her labor.

Political parties were also accused of exploiting nonworkers during election campaigns with unfulfilled promises of employment. URM01 shared, “Parties promised us jobs... Now when they see us, they act like they didn’t see.” More concerning were reports of coercion into risky or illegal activities. URM01 recounted receiving offers to transport narcotics under false pretenses. These examples underscore how prolonged unemployment and systemic neglect create vulnerabilities that can lead to exploitation and harm.

Impact of Discrimination

Socio-Political Impact

The divide between employed individuals and nonworkers reveals an antagonistic social dynamic rooted in both psychological perceptions and structural inequalities. While not always expressed through open conflict, this tension often manifests as persistent feelings of inadequacy and resentment among nonworkers. As one participant (RRF06) aptly put it: “Even if there’s no open argument, there’s always this inner anger.” This psychological strain is compounded by a societal framework that equates employment with social status and personal worth, often branding nonworkers as idle or unproductive, as URF04 observed.

Although much of this antagonism remains unspoken, it can surface in direct interpersonal conflict, particularly within families. Financial dependency frequently becomes a source of tension, with working family members expressing frustration over perceived imbalances, as highlighted by URF01. Even in the absence of overt conflict, nonworkers often internalize

feelings of exclusion, as noted by RRM06, leading to emotional distress and social isolation.

These interpersonal dynamics extend into the broader social fabric, eroding community cohesion. Nonworkers are often marginalized, while employed individuals may develop a sense of superiority, deepening societal divides. RRM05 noted, “Workers tend to band together, exhibiting a ruling behavior that seeks to dominate.” These psychological hierarchies contribute to fragmentation and instability at both community and societal levels.

Unemployment also exacerbates systemic inequalities by diminishing social capital, excluding individuals from civic engagement, and straining both familial and community relationships. The stigma associated with being unemployed undermines self-esteem and restricts access to support networks, further deepening feelings of

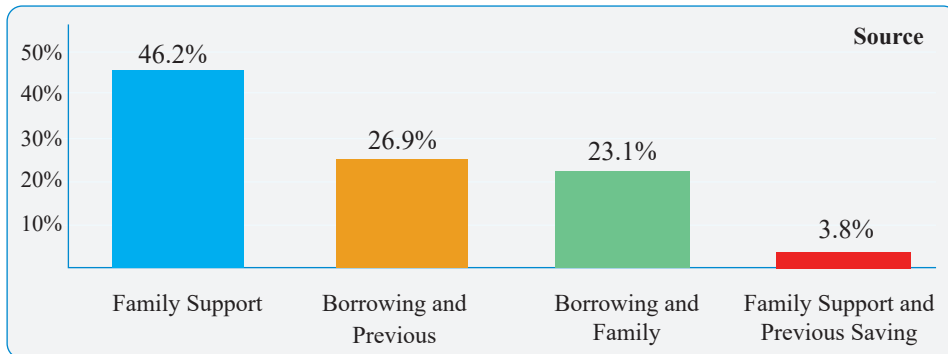
alienation and distrust. Ultimately, the socio-political impact of such antagonistic dynamics is profound, eroding individual well-being and collective social cohesion. Unemployment becomes not only an economic issue but a central driver of psychological tension, social exclusion, and societal instability.

Economic Impact

As shown in Figure 1, nonworkers face significant challenges in maintaining a stable standard of living, often relying on borrowing and family support. Participants such as URM07, RRF03, and RRF04 described depending on family or friends to cover daily expenses, revealing a recurring pattern of financial dependency driven by instability. Many resorted to borrowing from local savings groups or selling personal belongings, such as gold, to meet urgent needs, as reported by RRM06 and URF04.

Figure 1

The source of Expenses of Nonworkers



Note. Field work, 2025.

A significant portion of respondents struggle to meet basic necessities such as food and clothing without external support. For example, URM06 and URF03 emphasized that managing even fundamental needs is “impossible” without employment, while others, like RRM04 and URM03, reported delaying essential purchases due to financial constraints. Unemployment has wide-ranging economic effects, straining personal finances and relationships. It leads to reduced consumer spending, negatively impacting local economies and contributing to growing inequality.

This cycle hinders upward mobility and slows overall economic productivity.

Psychological and Emotional Impact

Nonworkers face deep emotional distress, shaped by societal, familial, and peer interactions. Feelings of isolation are widespread, as many avoid social situations to escape judgment or ridicule. For instance, URM07 shared, “I mostly stay at home,” while RRM04 noted, “I like staying at home rather than wandering with friends.” This self-imposed withdrawal reinforces their sense of exclusion.

Stress, depression, and even suicidal thoughts were common themes. URF01 stated, “It causes frustration, depression, and even suicidal thoughts,” illustrating the severe mental health toll caused by persistent societal and family pressure. Many participants reported experiencing anger—both inward and outward—triggered by negative interactions and unrelenting expectations. As RRF03 put it, “I feel torture when everyone says I am not doing anything.”

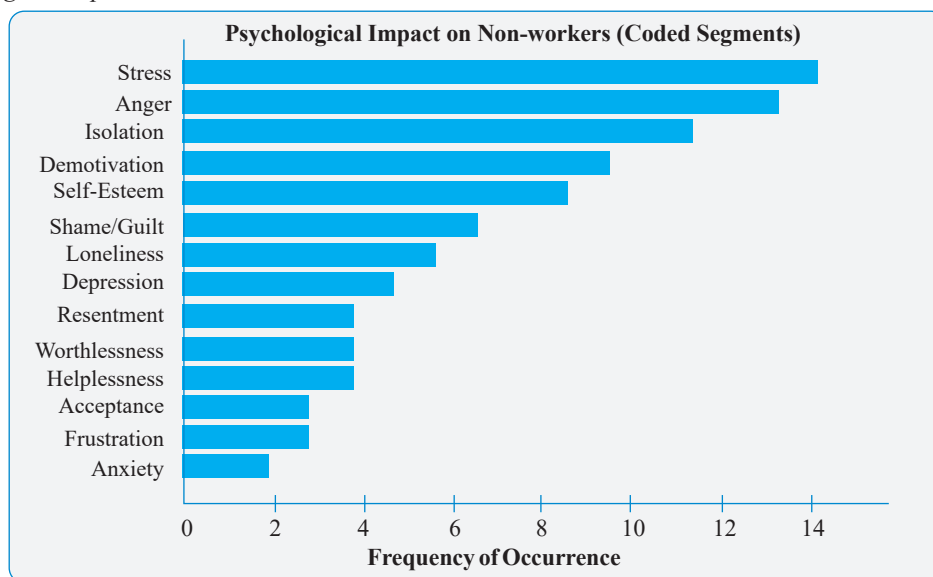
Nonworkers frequently reported feelings of worthlessness and declining self-esteem, often resulting from constant comparisons and criticism. RRF01 shared, “It feels like I am really worthless,” while RRF05 said, “I feel like I can’t do anything—self-esteem decreases.” These feelings were heightened when individuals perceived that less-qualified people were able to secure employment. URM03 expressed, “It makes me angry when I see that someone less qualified than myself is getting a job.”

A lack of motivation to seek employment often stems from continuous judgment and ridicule. Social interactions can be disheartening, with participants like RRF01 and URF04 mentioning teasing and gossip as common experiences. Many respondents expressed a sense of helplessness, feeling trapped in their circumstances and overwhelmed by negativity.

As illustrated in Figure 2, unemployment significantly intensifies emotional challenges, including loneliness and isolation, hopelessness and despair, anger and frustration, and a loss of identity. The psychological impact of unemployment is complex, affecting emotional well-being, self-worth, and motivation. Nonworkers face overwhelming societal and familial pressures that contribute to depression, emotional withdrawal, and frustration. The long-term mental health consequences of unemployment are profound and far-reaching.

Figure 2

Psychological Impact on Nonworkers



Note. Field work, 2025.

Discussion

The study reveals that unemployment among nonworkers in Nepal has profound psychological, socio-political, and economic consequences. It

emerges not merely as an economic condition but as a socially stigmatized status that fosters familial discrimination and systemic exclusion. Participants reported feelings of isolation,

demotivation, and diminished self-worth, rooted in societal norms that equate personal value with employment and professional designation. This normative framework contributes to the exclusion of nonworkers from social engagement, economic participation, and community decision-making.

Contrary to the traditional expectation of support, the family often becomes a site of discrimination for nonworkers. Respondents described unfavorable comparisons to employed relatives, verbal abuse, and restricted access to household resources. Even in economically secure households, nonworkers face reduced autonomy and financial dependence, suggesting that discrimination stems as much from cultural ideals of productivity as from material deprivation. These internal family hierarchies foster emotional distress, conflict, and feelings of inadequacy. The absence of a supportive home environment amplifies broader social exclusion and contributes to negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression (Gurr & Jungbauer-Gans, 2013).

Beyond the family, community perceptions further marginalize nonworkers. Employment—particularly in government positions—is associated with prestige and stability, while those without work are often the subject of gossip, excluded from social events, and overlooked in local decision-making. The widespread belief that employment defines individual worth results in social isolation and psychological harm. As Weber (1946, 2013) emphasizes, societal structures shape access to economic opportunities; in a system where employment determines status and resources, nonworkers are systematically pushed to the margins. The findings highlight a psychological divide wherein nonworkers internalize societal judgments, experiencing self-doubt and eroded self-esteem.

The government's role in perpetuating inequality is evident in its exclusionary policies, which prioritize benefits for the employed while neglecting nonworkers. Social protections—including healthcare, social security, and financial

aid—are typically reserved for workers, retirees, or widows, leaving nonworkers with minimal institutional support. This reflects deeper structural inequalities that ignore the vulnerabilities of the unemployed. The lack of effective job creation programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support further restricts pathways to employment. Corruption and favoritism in recruitment and resource allocation exacerbate these challenges, benefitting those with political or financial influence while marginalizing disadvantaged job seekers. These barriers reinforce social and economic hierarchies, trapping nonworkers in cycles of poverty and exclusion.

The recruitment process itself discriminates against nonworkers, especially those lacking connections or prior experience. Nepotism and favoritism dominate hiring practices, undermining meritocracy and sidelining the most vulnerable. Preference for individuals with work experience or influential networks perpetuates long-term unemployment, deepening the exclusionary nature of Nepal's labor market. These structural obstacles align with Weber's (1946) theory of social stratification, which explains how access to resources is unequally distributed, favoring those already in power.

The psychological effects of prolonged unemployment are severe. Participants reported feelings of anger, frustration, and isolation, which often culminate in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Persistent judgment, ridicule, and social comparison create an environment in which nonworkers feel demoralized and trapped. Some even reported experiencing suicidal thoughts, illustrating the intense emotional toll of prolonged unemployment (Gurr et al., 2029).

Violence and harassment in the job-seeking process further compound the vulnerability of nonworkers. Many encounter verbal abuse, discrimination, and even sexual coercion while seeking employment. Fear of retaliation or deeper exclusion prevents victims from reporting such incidents. This hostile environment discourages continued efforts to find work, perpetuating the cycle

of unemployment and exclusion. These findings align with Goffman's (1963) stigma theory, which posits that stigmatized individuals internalize negative societal attitudes, adversely affecting their self-perception and social interactions.

Working individuals often perceive nonworkers as lazy or unproductive, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that deepen resentment and feelings of inferiority among the unemployed. While often psychological, this tension can manifest in familial disputes and broader social friction. The economic divide between the employed and unemployed extends beyond material hardship, influencing self-worth, social status, and access to opportunities. Marx and Engels (1848) contend that class antagonism is a defining feature of capitalist societies, with one class exploiting another. Weber (1946) expands on this, emphasizing that competition for resources and social stratification fuels enduring conflicts between economic groups. This study suggests that while Nepal's nonworkers have not yet mobilized as a class, the psychological antagonism they face may evolve into collective action if class consciousness emerges (Aydin, 2018; Wright, 2005).

From an economic perspective, high unemployment contributes to stagnation by reducing household spending, increasing dependency, and limiting labor force participation. Nonworkers frequently rely on family or loans, straining household finances and constraining social mobility. Prolonged exclusion from the economy limits wealth accumulation and perpetuates poverty. The denial of financial resources and entrepreneurial opportunities prevents upward mobility and entrenches economic disparities.

The findings further underscore how nepotism, favoritism, and unequal access to education and skill development create a fundamentally uneven playing field, where employment outcomes are determined more by social networks and prior experience than merit. This exclusionary system ensures that the most vulnerable remain unemployed and unable to overcome economic and social constraints.

At a broader level, early signs of class antagonism are evident, with nonworkers increasingly experiencing psychological conflict with the employed class. This aligns with Wright's (2005) theory (Aryal, 2025), which argues that psychological conflict can evolve into class struggle when marginalized groups begin to recognize their shared oppression. The mounting frustration and resentment among nonworkers suggest that class consciousness could eventually lead to collective resistance. As Marx and Engels (1848) assert, class struggle drives social transformation—and unless structural inequalities are addressed, Nepal may face increasing economic and social tensions between its employed and unemployed populations.

Conclusion

This qualitative study, employing thematic analysis integrated with narrative interpretation of 26 in-depth interviews, provides a comprehensive exploration of the economic, socio-political, and psychological impacts on nonworkers in Nepal. The findings underscore pervasive inequalities and systemic oppression, revealing how societal structures, familial dynamics, and employment-based hierarchies collectively marginalize nonworkers and perpetuate cycles of dependency, exclusion, and emotional distress.

The lives of nonworkers are significantly shaped by the interplay of societal perceptions and familial attitudes that equate productivity and employment with personal worth. Their repeated exclusion from familial support, government programs, community participation, and job opportunities not only exacerbates their economic vulnerability but also reinforces social isolation. This marginalization is rooted in historical inequalities and perpetuated through cultural norms that prioritize employment as a marker of social and economic value. Discrimination, mistreatment, and the misuse of power by employed individuals during the job search process are pressing concerns.

The study highlights the economic disparities between workers and nonworkers. Nonworkers' reliance on borrowing and the postponement of essential needs reflect their precarious financial status, in stark contrast to the relative stability and access to safety nets enjoyed by the employed. Nepotism and political favoritism in hiring further entrench these disparities, limiting access to opportunities and reinforcing systemic discrimination. This economic divide contributes to broader societal fragmentation and sustains cycles of poverty and exclusion.

The psychological effects of unemployment emerge as a critical issue, with nonworkers frequently reporting diminished self-esteem, social withdrawal, and mental health challenges. Societal judgment and familial criticism intensify feelings of worthlessness, while social stigmatization reinforces a sense of inferiority. These emotional and psychological burdens not only reduce nonworkers' motivation to seek opportunities but also trap them in a persistent cycle of despair and disengagement.

The latent antagonism between workers and nonworkers, driven by socio-political dynamics and psychological distress, signals deeper implications of these inequalities. This divide threatens social cohesion, fosters resentment, and reinforces systemic disparities. While the study identifies primarily psychological forms of antagonism, it also emphasizes the potential for this tension to develop into class conflict, as theorized by Marx, Engels, and Wright, should class consciousness among nonworkers begin to solidify.

The findings underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms to address structural inequalities and to create a more inclusive society that values individuals beyond their employment status. Policy efforts should focus on equitable access to education, skill development, and fair employment opportunities, along with the effective implementation of comprehensive social safety nets. Moreover, cultural attitudes that stigmatize unemployment must be challenged to promote empathy, dignity, and social integration.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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