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Development Studies

Sixten Lundqvist  
910504-2213

Lund University  
Department of Sociology  
Bachelor of Science in Development Studies



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## Welfare Entitlements, Mitigating Tactics and Coping Strategies within the Mountaineering Industry in the Khumbu Region of Nepal

Author: Sixten Lundqvist  
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Supervisor: Lisa Eklund

## ABSTRACT

Author: Sixten Lundqvist

Title: The Aftermath of Accidents and Disasters on High Altitudes – Welfare entitlements, Mitigating Tactics, and Coping Strategies as Results of Tragic Events Relating to the Mountaineering Industry in the Khumbu Region of Nepal

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The Khumbu region of northeast Nepal has experienced dramatic socio-economic change along with the rise of tourism. The mountainous villages have developed and abandoned traditional lifestyles as tourists from all over the world come to experience the dramatic scenery of the Himalayas and ascent its peaks. The mountaineering industry thrives and does provide employment for the local inhabitants. However, it is not merely of positive matter as these occupations are of high risk, especially in regards to the locals. Numerous Nepali climbers have lost their lives to the mountaineering industry leaving their families with socio-economic difficulties or insecurities. Social provision and welfare institutions function differently, and therefore locals put their trust in NGO's and private sponsors to help once accidents occur. This thesis is based on qualitative empirical material, collected via ethnography, and previous literature that relate to the topic of how families cope with the loss of the family breadwinner. The main idea behind the research conducted was to investigate socio-economic dilemmas experienced by families of deceased breadwinners' and coping strategies adopted by families following the breadwinner's death. The analysis included in this paper discusses how the NGO's, as well as strong community structures, provide welfare in the Khumbu region these families. It also examines the aspects of why this happens to be the outcome, and possible alternatives to the existing approaches.

*Keywords:* Welfare, risk, community, third sector, social structures, Nepal

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NGO - Non-governmental Organization

NMA - Nepal Mountaineering Association

CSO - Civil Society Organization

HT - Himalayan Trust

SEF - Sherpa Educational Fund

MDRES - Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund

BCF - Benoit Chamoux Foundation

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Figure 1 – Map of the Khumbu region, obtained from [www.nepaltravelandtour.com](http://www.nepaltravelandtour.com)

Figure 2 – The village of Namche Bazaar, photograph taken by the author

Figure 3 – The villages of Khumjung and Khunde, photograph taken by the author

# 1. INTRODUCTION

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 an avalanche came rolling down the Khumbu Icefall of Mount Everest, killing 16 Nepali guides. The Khumbu Icefall is part of the Khumbu glacier that starts at the beginning of Mount Everest. It is considered one of the more dangerous parts whilst ascending, as it is unreliable and prone to avalanches, hence claiming lives rather often.

Mountaineering and climbing is a dangerous activity, especially on higher mountains reaching altitudes above 8000m, like Mount Everest (Bjønnes, 1986). Tourist mountaineers acknowledge the high risk, yet challenges it in order to achieve a feeling of joy or to test ones own endurance. For expeditions to successfully ascent mountains, like Mount Everest, a tremendous amount of preparation and assistance is required. Local Nepali people of the Khumbu region partake in both preparation and assistance. Engaging in these activities are highly dangerous and can sadly result in the loss of lives often. The locals of the Khumbu region do not necessarily share the touristic mind-set, yet exposes themselves to this high risk in order to economically provide for their families. An economic activity of such high risk calls for well functioning and effective welfare structures.

Welfare institutions and social provision actors function to provide socio-economic security and certain level of well being among populations. Family, market or state are actors thought to provide these arguable necessities (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The inhabitants of poorer countries, like Nepal, can seldom rely on the state to function in proper manner, as they invest poorly in social benefit institutions (Croissant, 2004), and will in its place trust market and, especially, family to operate accurate and in a beneficial manner (Tao, 2004:131-133).

## 1.1 AIM AND PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to analyze welfare institutions and social structures in regards families who in some way engaged in the mountaineering industry in the Khumbu region of Nepal. Likewise, it examines social structures, risk mitigation and coping strategies, both formal and informal. This thesis is based on empirical material,

gathered through qualitative research methods. The findings are compared, discussed and analyzed within the bounds of an eclectic mix of theoretical frameworks.

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate how families who have suffered the loss of a breadwinner cope with socio-economic dilemmas. It includes examine welfare institutions and social structures in the Khumbu region of Nepal. Therefore, it specifically focuses on investigating how welfare is distributed, how social benefits are appreciated, the effectiveness of current strategies, and how families deal with socio-economic difficulties. It incorporates interviewing informants who relate to the topic of welfare structures in the Khumbu region. It also include evaluating the empirical material, as well as identifying subjective opinions, that can contribute to the general assessment of welfare institutions and social provision experience by the residents in the Khumbu region in the Himalayas of Nepal. To paint a more clear and holistic picture it was of necessity to investigate what ways tourism has influenced welfare approaches and if alternative approaches can be considered or developed. The research question therefore remains “How Do Families Cope with the Loss of the Family Breadwinner? – A Case Study on Welfare Structures in the Khumbu Region of Nepal, and the Risks of Engaging in the Mountaineering Industry”.

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this topic relates to welfare institutions and actors providing social services. Welfare is mainly provided via family networks, and several families in the Khumbu region are based on the male breadwinner model. Therefore it is often the case that income, as well economic security, disappears for remaining family members once the breadwinner’s life is lost whilst engaging in the mountaineering industry. The significance of this field is not only related to the death of Nepali locals working for tourists, but the after-math resulting in negative consequences affecting remaining family members. This includes children being forced to leave school, and not seek higher education, in order to deal with domestic quandaries. The field of this research also touches upon the fact that the majority of deaths occurring on high altitude are Nepali people, and not foreign tourists.

The 2014 avalanche on Mount Everest was not the first avalanche to claim Nepali lives. However, it did create a clout of demands among Nepali population working on high altitude. They claimed that exploitation by expedition groups towards Nepali workers had been going on for a long time and a need for improving working conditions and enhancement of insurances was a necessity. The call for change, and the dire consequences of the tragic accident, resulted in the uniting of Nepali climbers leading to a refusal of climbing Mount Everest for the remaining season as a sign of respect towards the deceased.

The importance of this research includes examining social structures, evaluating the risk factor, and discussing welfare institutions, both positive and negative aspects. This thesis provides deep insights to community structures in the Khumbu region and offer information on how affected families may suffer from socio-economic dilemmas, and how such obstacles of similar nature are overcome. This paper hopes to deliver further understanding in regards to welfare institutions and welfare structures in the Khumbu region of Nepal.

The focus of this thesis relates mainly to the tragic 2014 avalanche, and the actions of welfare institutions and the effectiveness of their strategies of social provision in regards to the tragedy. However, Nepal suffered an earthquake on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2015, that not only affected people in Kathmandu but set of an avalanche that reached Mount Everest Base camp, which resulted in the deaths of over 20 climbers. Therefore, the significance and relevance of this paper does not merely relate to the evaluating of old structures, but also identification of areas, regarding welfare institutions, of weakness where improvement towards welfare strategies may be necessary.

This thesis hopes to contribute in filling the research gap of academic publishing in regards to high-risk tourist activities that can affect local people in negative ways. This thesis focuses on the Khumbu region of Nepal, the mountaineering industry, and its welfare structures and strategies. However, its content can still be applied to other areas with similar scenarios and obstacles.

### 1.3 BACKGROUND

The area chosen for this research is located in the Himalayas of Nepal. The region is called Khumbu and includes the villages of Namche Bazaar, Khunde, Khumjung, and Thame, which is where the interviews were conducted as well as where the participatory observation was performed.

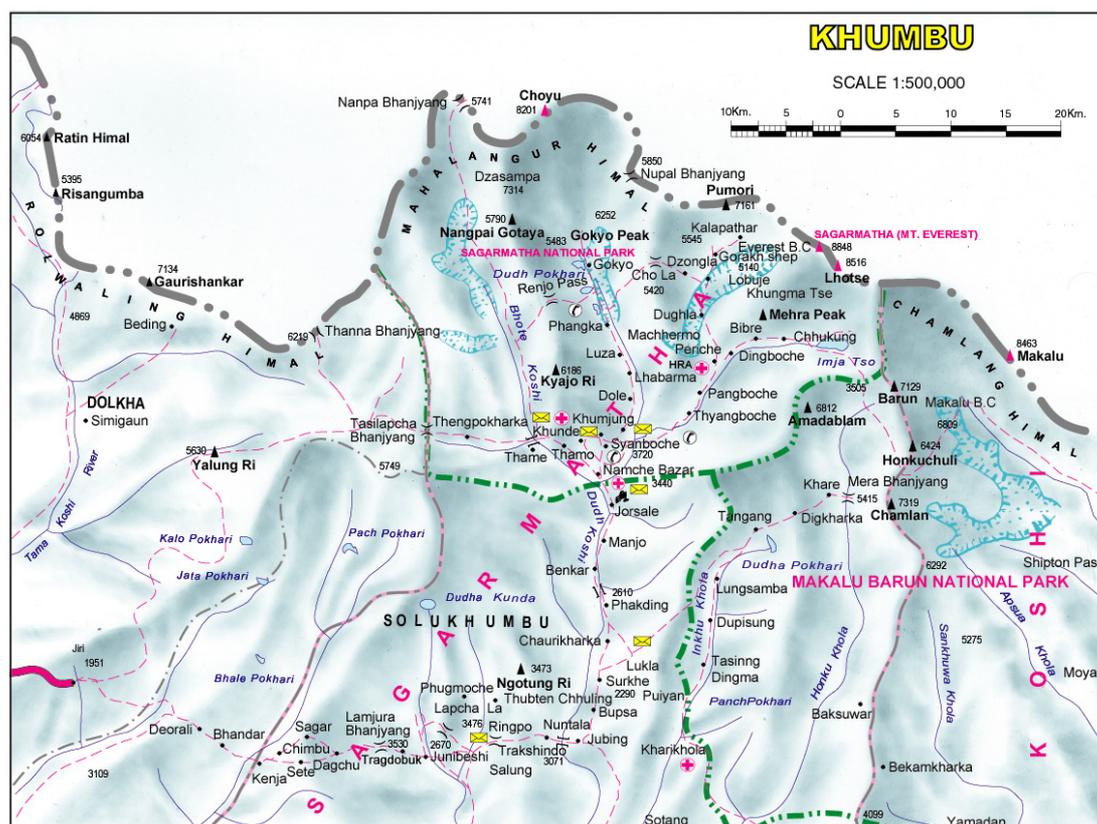


Figure 1. Map of the Khumbu region, obtained from [www.nepaltravelandtours.com](http://www.nepaltravelandtours.com)

The Khumbu region has, ever since the first successful Mount Everest ascent by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa in 1953, experienced dramatic change (Stevens, 1993). Namche Bazaar, which function as a hub for mountaineers as well as trekkers who aim to either ascent mountains or enjoy the Himalayan landscape, has developed immensely as a result of tourism. Namche Bazaar is located on the Everest Base Camp trek and on an altitude of approximately 3400 meters above the sea level, meaning it is ideal for acclimatization.



*Figure 2. The village of Namche Bazaar, photograph taken by the author*

Its location forces the majority tourists to stay at least two nights in order to avoid later altitude sickness. The high number of tourists shifted Namche Bazaar's economy from a community based on trade, animal husbandry and agriculture to rely almost solely on the tourism sector (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998:73-75). Guesthouses outnumber residential houses and conveniences such as ATM's and WIFI are available.

In comparison to Namche Bazaar, the villages of Khunde, Khumjung and Thame holds more traditional atmospheres and still engage in the former economies of agriculture, trade and animal husbandry. The different villages provide accommodation and restaurants for tourists; however, as they are not on the trail towards the deep Himalayas nor in direction of the popular Everest Base Camp trek, it is not essential for tourists to neither stop nor spend time there. Not only are the differentiation between guesthouses in comparison to Namche Bazaar significant, but also the amount of local residents. Khunde, Khumjung and Thame have higher numbers of local people residing than Namche, and the people do not necessarily nor directly engage in the tourism sector. Though it is not uncommon that the residents, or locals, from all the mentioned villages engage in the mountaineering industry.



*Figure 3. The villages of Khumjung and Khunde, photograph taken by the author*

People of the Sherpa ethnicity established the villages mentioned in the previous paragraph. They inhabited the high lands of Himalayas early on and became, along with the first successful Mount Everest ascent known for their mountainous skills and endurance on high altitude. The term Sherpa has arguably lost its meaning (Fisher, 1990) and instead become a description of a person able to carry heavy loads on high altitude (Stevens, 1993). It is a false generalization, the same as claiming all Swedish Sami to be reindeer herders. With that being said, it is however not uncommon that Sherpa people do engage in the mountaineering industry.

The rumor regarding the Sherpa people may be a result of their abilities, or a myth forcing them to act accordingly (Ortner, 1991:56-57). Either way, as stated, Sherpas do engage in the mountaineering industry. Along with the Sherpa, people from all over Nepal, regardless of ethnicity, come to the Khumbu region engaging in the mountaineering industry. Associated with this occupation is the high-risk level, which will be discussed latter sections. In relation to the risk that can result in death or injury, are the various form of formal and informal welfare, which too will be discussed and analyzed.

## 1.4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous literature, examining the conditions of the past in the Khumbu region, describes egalitarian societies where gender divisions among labor activities were not significant (Brower, 1991:51- 52). The participation in agriculture, trade and animal husbandry in order to provide household income was equally shared among the

genders. There were still significant differences of income levels between households, but wealth was not necessarily measured in monetary wealth but rather in the amount possessions (Fürer- Haimendorf, 1964:271).

Once tourism was introduced in the Khumbu region the lifestyles and economy of before shifted to instead satisfy the needs of tourists. The village of Namche Bazaar underwent the most severe change, but the entire Khumbu region has been affected by tourism in many ways, such as economic development, foreign interest, and growth of social benefit institutions, like schools and hospitals (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998). Beside the positive outcomes as results of tourism, culture and traditional ways are disappearing, and youth often leave for higher education and possibilities of new opportunities that did not exist before, meaning abandonments of old assemblies.

A negative outcome discussed by Ortner (1999) and recently included in news papers and magazine publishing, rather than academic publishing, is the amount of local Nepali climbers who lose their lives helping tourist reach difficult mountain peaks in the Himalayas. Though hard to be precise, it is estimated that around 10% of those who attempt to climb Mount Everest die (Ortner, 1999:6-7). This 10 % death chance may not be considered with too much negative affection for tourists aiming to ascend one time. However, many Nepali mountain guides ascend mountains like Mount Everest several times as part of their occupation, leaving them more exposed to this death risk. The National Geographic and The L.A Times (See web sources, section 6.2) have both published articles focusing on natural disasters, especially the avalanche disaster of 2014, and the accident risk that Nepali climbers are exposed to, which Ortner describes as a near exploitation of labor usage in the Khumbu region. The magazine articles include description of why accidents occur, how the Nepali guides are more exposed than tourists, and the number of families left without a father, and often without an income. These aspects are core foundations of this thesis and are to be discussed in latter analytical sections. This paper hopes to contribute in filling the gap of academic publishing on coping strategies of local people negatively affected by the high-risk tourist activity of mountaineering in the Khumbu region of Nepal.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework suggested for this paper is eclectic as the theories deal with different aspects, yet can operate together in order to create a more holistic analysis. It is held that the theories will function more solid all together rather than leaving one out. The male breadwinner model endures in Khumbu, and fathers engage in the mountaineering industry in order to provide an income for their families. The mountaineering labor field is of high accident risk, and once death occur, and the breadwinner is no more, it may be merely through a selection welfare approach, functioning in relation to welfare pluralism, that families can preserve a stable economic income as well as their livelihood, and experience a level of social care.

### 2.1 MALE BREADWINNER

The male breadwinner model describes structures within families, and how the father of a family should provide an income, for the whole family, whilst the mother act as care taker for children as well as conducting domestic chores (Parson & Bales, 1955:14-15). The theory is somewhat longstanding and therefore criticized for not being applicable in many parts of today's world. It is critiqued for excluding certain family patterns, focusing rather on how the economic contributions conducted by the father is what permits families to function, instead of acknowledging the element that the mother's contributions is what allows the father to engage in labor activity full time. The model evaluates families as singularities and closed systems, with simple structures that are isolated from outside forces, rather than considering them forms of social networks, which too hold complexity (Ochiai, 2009). It argued that adapting this strategy does not help eradicate poverty (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and instead hinders social development (Lewis, 1992). However, the male breadwinner model is still applicable to the existing circumstances and structures in the Khumbu region, hence valid for this research. Numerous families have adapted versions of the male breadwinner model. It is often the case that fathers engage as mountain guides in order to provide a stable income for families and for example help financing children's education. Mothers', in families based on the male breadwinner model, are not necessarily unemployed but obtain a significantly lower income. The occupations they possess often relate to operating tea or guesthouses that are incorporated into their

homes. Therefore the theory adapts and relates well for this research, and a more detailed discussion of why is included in the latter analysis section, section 4.2.

## 2.2 SELECTIVE SOCIAL PROVISION

The second theoretical framework selected to present the findings of this thesis and used to later compare, analyze and discuss the topic is the selection approach by Titmuss (1968). Titmuss discusses the difference between universalism, meaning that social benefits are provided for everyone, versus selection, meaning that social benefits are provided for a specific group with specific needs. The selection approach is therefore a more tailor made strategy and not a welfare strategy for everyone to rely on. The narrow focus of this strategy is believed to enhance the effectiveness in delivering social benefits for the people requiring it. The theory can be criticized for acting in a quick-fix manner, hence avoiding long-term solutions. The theory arguably also holds unequal values and discards how social justice is an entitlement for all (Commission on Social Justice, 1993:61). In addition, the theory often relates to market based welfare, and is therefore criticized for aiming on maximizing profit for the market based welfare actors executing this approach, rather than focusing on enhancing well-being for people (O'Connor, 2001). The selection approach, however, relates closely to this topic as the qualitative empirical material gathered for this thesis indicates that NGO's and foreign sponsors often provide for families of deceased mountain guides. The families who suffered the death of a breadwinner are a specific group of specific needs. The social provision provided by the NGO's and private sponsors are of positive perception among the respondents and function to provide financial help for children in order to be able to attend school as well as providing financial support for the households.

## 2.3 WELFARE PLURALISM

Welfare pluralism describes how a range of actors can function in delivering welfare (Dahlberg, 2005)(Hogg & Baines 2011). In relation to welfare pluralism, the concept emphasizes the importance of the 'third sector' (Evers, 1995), or voluntary sector, in regards to providing social services. It is often considered to function supplementary to the state, or even replacing the state as a welfare actor completely (Dahlberg, 2005). The 'third sector' often operates accordingly to what is needed, hence working

to enhance specific needs of a community. The 'third sector' often arises through civil society identifying a problem that other welfare actors are avoiding, or not dealing appropriately with, then organizing itself in order to solve the occurring dilemma.

Welfare pluralism functions in relation to the earlier presented selection approach by Titmuss (1968) and relates to the topic of this research as its narrow focus allows analyzing and examining affected families in the Khumbu region. It allows evaluating the effectiveness of various welfare actors, especially the non-governmental organizations, and contributes to the understanding of the different strategies adapted by the various actors.

## 2.4 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CARE AND THE CARE DIAMOND

Social care is a rather ambiguous term holding many definitions. The concept is often included in relation to welfare analysis and the provision of welfare. Simplistically, its focus lies in the provision of social comfort experienced by individuals (Razavi, 2000). This thesis adapts the definition provided by Daly and Lewis (2000) in order to be specific. Their definition includes how individuals of all ages are ensured interconnectedness and being cared for via informal and formal actors that do not need be paid for. In relation to the concept of social care, the 'care diamond' will be applied. The care diamond contributes as an analytical tool in relation to social care. It helps identify what welfare actors are the main providers of social care in a community or society. The common actors, and the actors included for this thesis, are family, market, state and non-profit organizations (Ochia, 2009).

The concept of social care and the care diamond model is included in this thesis in order to provide and add different dimensions of welfare. Consequently, care providers and the necessity of social care can be identified and evaluated. It helps in providing a holistic picture of welfare structures and the valuing of different welfare strategies along with welfare providers in the Khumbu region of Nepal.

## 2.5 LIVELIHOOD

Livelihoods is a somewhat broad theoretical framework that too holds many definitions and interpretations. Briefly, it can be described as necessities in order to construct a living (Scoones, 2009), which is the definition adapted for this thesis. The concept has been included for this paper in order to examine the necessities require for families to obtain a decent life after loosing a breadwinner. It is argued that livelihood can be achieved through social relations and through social benefit institutions (de Haan & Zoomers 2005). Therefore, as families in Khumbu rely on community structures and NGO operations it was considered of great benefit to include this framework, both for the methodology as well as the analyzing part.

## 2.6 RISK

In order to appreciate and understand why people engage in high-risk labor it was thought to be of value to incorporate and analyze the risk factor as well as the concept of risk. Different people, societies and cultures perceive risk differently. Risk can be subjective and objective, and be constructed by surrounding elements that exist in everyday life (Zinn, 2008). Socio-cultural risk could include how different cultures assess risk differently. It is not an impossibility to consider the societies in the Khumbu region to have a different opinion of danger, than tourists and outsiders, as villages are located high up, exposed to elements such as altitude sickness, dangerous trails and natural disasters. Therefore, it can be claimed that there is a cultural bias to the concept of risk (Zinn, 2008), especially in regards to the inhabitant of the Khumbu region. The concept of risk, and how risk may be constructed, is thus well applicable.

## 2.7 LINKING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This eclectic approach, where several theoretical frameworks are brought together, is used in order to create a broader understanding of the topic. The analysis of the empirical material, presented later in section 4, is conducted both in relation to each of the frameworks, in order to make the analysis more specific, and more holistically, in order to provide a more general evaluation of the current scenario. It is suggested, as mentioned in the introduction of this section, that the various theoretical frameworks can be linked with one and another. This does not merely mean that the theories can be related to one and another but can also help in enhancing each other.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methods included in this thesis, and used during the field operation, are ethnography, including semi-structured interviews and participatory observation, and purposive and theoretical sampling, along with coding as the main tool of analyzing the gathered empirical material. In relation to these methods, ethical considerations as well as limitations are discussed and functioning to acknowledge difficulties and enhance transparency. In order to contribute further to the transparency of this paper, a brief explanation regarding the creation and evolvement of the research question follows.

Along with refining the methodology as well as gathering and analyzing the empirical material the research question has been changed in order to fit the topic in a descriptive as well as accurate manner. From the early stages of planning the research question that was thought to be suitable for this topic remained “How Does the Tourist Based Economy of Namche Bazaar Help or Hinder the Implementation of Social Policies and Welfare Structures?”. This research question was considered to be befitting, however a realization occurred that this question was far too broad and perhaps even implausible to investigate. It would result in abstract answers as well as exclude subjective responds by respondents. Though the first research question may be considered of importance, it was narrowed down and made more specific. The question that followed abode “How Do Families Cope With the Loss of the Family Breadwinner? – A Study on the Sherpa Community of Namche Bazaar, Nepal and the Risks of Being a Mountain Guide”. This research question allowed for a more fine line of research, yet still, holistically, able to include and discuss the aim of the initial research question.

The second formulation of the research question did too include faults. The sub-topic of “A Study on the Sherpa Community in Namche Bazaar, Nepal and the Risk of Being a Mountain Guide” suggested that the only respondents for interviews would be of the Sherpa ethnicity and not including other populations or ethnicities. Therefore, the final result of the research question stands “How Do Families Cope With the Loss of the Family Breadwinner? - A Case Study on Welfare Structures in the Khumbu Region of Nepal and the Risks of Engaging in the Mountaineering

Industry”. The main focus is on the current situation of the affected families and their strategies, and alternatives ways, of how to cope with socio-economic dilemmas. The sub-topic handles the various welfare approaches and social structures, as well as a perception of the risk factor included in the engagement of the mountaineering industry. It acknowledges how the research is presented in the manner of a case study as the research focuses on the Khumbu region of Nepal. The chosen, and thought to be most appropriate, case study models are ‘unique case study’ and ‘representative case study’ (Bryman, 2006:52-54). The ‘unique case study’ model acknowledges how the topic is somewhat unexplored. The ‘representative case study’ allows this thesis to examine various social processes existing in the Khumbu region, and providing a broad understanding of the topic and how to evaluate the scenario in regards to the research question appropriately (Bryman, 2006:52-56).

### 3.1 ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography, or participatory observation, was the first steps for this research and hence first part of the time spent in the field. It included actively observing and note taking (Bryman, 2012:431-432) on aspects of the Khumbu society that would enhance latter interview processes, allow for a greater understanding of the culture, and captured standard moments in everyday life (Holliday, 2007:7). The ethnography phase proved valuable as it also permitted social patterns to be identified, and taken into consideration for interviews and the latter analytical stage. It possibly also made it easier to engage with the local population and experience a more moderate, or natural, treatment by the respondents for the interviews, as questions asked were not too simplistic or perhaps considered obvious by the interviewees.

The duration of the stay in the Khumbu region lasted for 8 weeks. During the stay, the researcher lived the majority of the time in the villages of Namche Bazaar, together with a family of the Sherpa ethnicity who were operating a guesthouse and a museum established to preserve the Sherpa culture in the Khumbu region. The researcher was therefore sharing somewhat similar living circumstances with the locals. The researcher travelled the trekking routes along with the locals of the Khumbu region, when visiting the other villages in order to gather empirical material.

The empirical material gathered via ethnography, or participatory observation, is presented, analyzed and discussed in section 4.1 and 5.1.

### 3.2 PURPOSIVE AND THEORETICAL SAMPLING

The interviewing process included finding suitable respondents. In order to achieve such a scenario a theoretical approach of purposive sampling was conducted. It involved firstly, finding respondents befitting for the research question. Secondly selecting later respondents depending on previous interview experience. As empirical material was gathered and analyzed, the topics that emerged influenced the choosing for later interviewees (Bryman, 2006:458).

At the commencement of the interviewing process mainly porters and mountain guides were interviewed. This was due to their knowledge regarding social benefits, social structures and risk related to their line of work. After numerous interviews with the respondents of initial choice were conducted, the focus of death, parentless children, NGO's and foreign sponsorship emerged. Due to this information, the following respondents, with experience regarding the fields mentioned, were searched for and found. The latter interviewees were engaged in the professions of medical care and teaching. A medical doctor was able to provide more accurate info on what actually happened on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, as the bodies were flown to him. He also provided general thoughts on how to mitigate the risk of climbing Mount Everest and how families who suffered loss, living in nearby villages, cope with socio-economic dilemmas. The teachers who were interviewed offered valuable and specific information on how the families, especially children, who experienced tragic loss, cope with socio-economic dilemmas, and how the education systems help these affected children.

The last three interviews were conducted in Kathmandu and included two officials from the Nepal Mountaineering Association and one financial advisor at the Himalayan Trust headquarters in Nepal. These three interviews delivered information regarding rules and regulations concerning Nepali mountaineers and how an NGO, this being the Himalayan Trust, operates to enhance people's lives. These interviewees functioned as key informants (Bryman, 2012:440), which included provision of more concrete empirical material as well as direct information regarding

NGO work as well as support provided by Nepal Mountaineering Association. In comparison to the earlier interviews, these were presented with less subjectivity regarding welfare structures and social provision, hence more objective answers of how current structures function.

### 3.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

All the interviews conducted were performed in a semi-structured manner. Hence, topics for the interviews were established beforehand and functioned to create a somewhat informal conversation with the respondent where questions, related to the topic of choice, were discussed and follow up questions on interesting aspects were asked (Bryman, 2012:196). The semi-structured interviews acted successfully, hence contributing to useful empirical material suitable for this thesis. The informality of the conversations and guideline question, directing the dialogue towards designated topics, allowed discussions regarding death and well-being of children, that could be considered sensitive, to flow somewhat smooth.

A total of 29 interviews were conducted, where 21 were audio recorded and 8 recorded via detailed notes. 24 of the interviewees were male and 5 were female. The timespan of the interviews lasted between 10 to 40 minutes. The age of the respondents varied from 20 years of age to 75 years of age. All interviews were held in English, as the respondents were well familiar with the language. No follow up interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews provided subjective opinions and informative descriptions (Punch, 2005:168) of welfare and community structures, well appropriate for this analysis.

The topics discussed during the various interviews included: risk, risk mitigation, tourism, insurances, social benefits, welfare, social structures, NGO's and foreign sponsors. The topic of risk would mainly circulate around the subjective feeling regarding engaging in mountaineering on high altitude. It would cover why the respondent stopped or continued climbing. Risk mitigation would focus on the aspect of strategies toward dodging a scenario where the respondent's family would loose economic income. The topics of social benefits and welfare examined socio-economic securities, hence relating to risk mitigation. Regarding social structures, this topic

functioned to provide more specific description of societies in the Khumbu region. The interview topics of NGO operations and foreign sponsors were well informative and offered information regarding welfare systems, hence relating to the topics of social benefits and welfare. The NGO's most commonly discussed were The Himalayan Trust, The Sherpa Educational Fund, Benoit Chamoux Foundation and The Alex Lowe Foundation. The support and work conducted by these organizations are to be analyzed in the latter sections. Another common discussion topic, along with NGO operations, was the work of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, which furthermore is included for the analytical part. The discussions regarding foreign sponsors focused on how private people donating money directly to families who recently had suffered the loss of the family breadwinner. An interview guide for this thesis can be found in section 7.2, and a list of interviewees and organizations in section 7.3.

### 3.4 ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The method used for the analysis of the empirical material was the basic operations of coding (Bryman, 2012:575-578). Once the interviews were transcribed into documents it was possible to enable this method. It included labeling topics of interest and identifying themes or concepts, as well as establishing categories. Different responds by the interviewees were therefore coded, or labeled, in relation to what was being discussed. An example of this is how an interviewee answering negatively by accusing the Nepali government of corruption would be labeled as 'Government criticism'. And an answer praising the current NGO operations would be labeled 'NGO appreciation'. After the various labels, or codes, were established it was possible to continue the analysis by identifying concepts and later categorize the empirical material. Concepts could include ideas of families cope with economic difficulties or how people perceive risk. It was then possible to divide the concepts and codes into different categories with example titles like economic support and risk perception.

This analytical approach allowed the author to grasp a greater understanding of the gathered empirical material, as identification of different topics in relation to the various theoretical frameworks were possible to spot. It also made it simpler in

analyzing and assessing the empirical material in relation to the theoretical frameworks once the empirical material was turned into codes and concepts. However, some claims made by the interviewees were accurate enough to be included in this thesis as quotes rather than codes, concepts or categories. Therefore, the latter analytical section, section 4, deals with the empirical material both on a personal level, by including quotes from the interviewees, and more holistically, by discussing the material more generally as codes, concepts or categories, in regards to the frameworks.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical aspects worth bearing in mind regarding this topic was the affected children who had lost their fathers to climbing. A complete avoidance of engaging in discussion with these children was necessary in order to not cross any moral boundaries. Interviewing children was generally avoided for this thesis as a result of ethical dilemmas.

Another aspect that lands under ethical reflections was the sensitive nature of the research topic. Though coping strategies and death were still topics discussed during the interviews it was important to acknowledge the responds by the interviewees. If the interviewees acted with negative affection once the sensitive parts of this research were brought up, it was considered necessary not to discuss it further as the interviewees deemed it offensive. During these times it was also of importance to bear in mind that the topic might not only be sensitive but also intrusive. If similar responds were noticed, same measures were taken.

### 3.6 LIMITATIONS

A criticism, as well as limitation, is the gender perspective regarding the interviewees. Unfortunately, as briefly mentioned in section 2, there are hardly any women employed as guides or engaging in the mountaineering industry. Therefore, the female to male ratio is unbalanced as only 5 women were interviewed for this research. Another aspect contributing to the fact that few women were interviewed was due to their general low level of English. This dilemma has resulted in important opinions and valuable empirical material not being included for the later analysis.

Another limitation was the low level of English among the elderly. Many elders have great experience regarding mountaineering, historical knowledge in relation to the Khumbu region, and how the mountaineering industry has changed. Merely one elder, with English skills sufficient enough, was interviewed for this research. The knowledge of the elders could otherwise have provided further valuable empirical material befitting for this research. The language barrier, in regards to women and elderly, has therefore resulted in a reflection bias. This obstacle could have been overcome by hiring a translator or interpreter. This was regrettably not a possibility due to lacking economic resources experienced by the researcher.

In order to gain deeper insights of the interviewees opinion regarding this research topic, follow up interviews were scheduled. However, due to many of the respondents being on travelling foot, these were all cancelled because of a shrinking time frame.

Being a Western, educated university student, could have affected the responses by informants during interviews (Bryman, 2012:227). Characteristics, such as socio-economic status or cultural background may have affected questions asked by the researcher as well as the answers provided by the informants, hence affecting the gathered empirical material.

## 4. ANALYSIS

The ethnography, including the semi-structured interviews, provided qualitative information regarding welfare structures as well as empirical material on how families cope with the loss of the family breadwinner. The interviewees had different occupations and backgrounds but were all related to mountaineering industry, either direct or indirect. The gathered empirical material was transcribed from audio recording of the interviews or detailed notes taken during the interviews. The transcribed empirical material was coded and categorized. Through the codes and categories it was possible to spot concepts of importance, hence enhancing the analytical process and relating the analyzed empirical material to the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2006:550-551).

#### 4.1 LABOR HIERARCHIES AND LABOR DIVISIONS

The social structures existing in the Khumbu region are rather noteworthy. Regarding the climbing industry, there is a clear labor hierarchy concerning the different position that can easily be separated into different groups. At the bottom is the average porter. A porter functions as a transporter and can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of porters carrying loads for households and shops. The loads consist of general goods, such as foods and clothing. The second type operates to help tourists carrying luggage. It includes baggage for simple tourists trekking or heavy gear to the Everest Base Camp, as well as other camps, used for later expeditions. Porters are usually not educated and hold low levels of English. In the middle of this hierarchy come trekking guides. Trekking guides occupation include touring tourists around safe trails in the Khumbu region of the Himalayas. They hold higher English level and better education, at least regarding the geography, culture and nature of the Khumbu region and the Himalayas. It is somewhat common that the occupation of being a trekking guide is merely seasonal work, and that they are either students or have another job during the low season for tourist trekking. At the top of this hierarchy comes the mountain guides, or high altitude mountain guides, who are well familiar with the mountains of Nepal and the Himalayas, hold high levels of mountaineering education, and speak English in well understandable manners.

An obvious division between the groups in this labor hierarchy is the income. Porters make little and are usually paid depending on how many kilograms they carry, while guides, both trekking and mountain guides, have a formal salary funneled by trekking companies or travel agencies. High altitude mountain guides have higher salaries than trekking guides. The social division between the two different guides is of little matter yet somewhat significant, as it seem that high mountain guides tend to be more respectable in the Khumbu societies. The hierarchy of labor divisions among people engaged in the mountaineering industry is defined and porters are looked upon with less admiration.

There is a big difference. People don't care about the porters. Porterage is not that risky so people don't care even though they carry 60-70 kilos. And they don't have nice shoes or clothes or foods. Lodges owners don't allow them to sit inside. Sometimes they sleep outside in caves. We have seen people sleeping outside here. Making fires and cooking food.

*Ang, former head teacher of Khumjung School, 23.02.2015*

Ang presented how portering is occupation associated with little respect in the Khumbu region and how people tend to care less of people in this labor field. The empirical material, however, suggests that mobility between the different statuses is possible. Mountain guides who partook in interviews stated how they used to work as porters when they were younger, and managed to become both trekking and later mountain guides due to knowledge gained through portering.

Within this hierarchy, it is mainly the people employed as mountain guides who are exposed to the risk of losing their lives. As accidents, related to mountaineering in the Khumbu region, mainly happen on high altitude, both porters and trekking guides have considerably safe working conditions. Many of the Nepali mountain guides who lost their lives in the avalanche accident on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, were fathers and husbands, and breadwinners for entire families.

#### 4.1.1 GENDER DIVIDE

A rather strange anomaly that breaks away from, or contradicts, the once egalitarian societies (Brower, 1991:51-52) that may have existed in the Khumbu region before the introduction of tourism, is the gender division. Hardly any women are employed as porter or guides for tourists. However, it is still a constant occurrence that women will act as porters for households or guesthouses. It is a rather notable scenario as the tourists visiting the Khumbu are of both genders, however serviced only by Nepali men. The ethnography presented how Nepali women show similar levels of strength and endurance as they too carry heavy loads, however mainly for domestic use. Women portering are not seen on more touristic trekking routes, leaving their portering skills, both the weight they carry as well as length they travel, hard to assess. However, it would not be impossible to imagine women being well fit and prepared for portering for tourists as they do porter for households and domestic use.

The exclusion from this labor field is arguably not result of historical patterns, as previous literature emphasizes the egalitarian aspects of the Khumbu region. Informants did not provide clear answers of why women mountain guides were anomalies. Instead the general mind-set, among the informants, seemed to conclude that mountain guides are usually men, and that is the way it is. There were no mentioning of lacking strength or endurance. One informant, one of the five female informants, stated that usually it is unsafe for Nepali women to trek alone in the mountains, hence claiming that this scenario could contribute to why there are so few female mountain guides.

[...] Because the trekking route is not safe for females [...]. It is not safe to trek, it is OK in Khumbu. But other places are not good for girls. We cannot get separate rooms.

*Ang, teacher at Namche Bazaar School, 12.03.2015*

However, Ang assured that the strong community networks in the Khumbu region, including how well related people are with one and another, allows the area to be safer than other regions in Nepal, and should therefore permit women to work in this labor field. She considered the reason for the unsafely working conditions, within the mountaineering industry in Nepal, to be a result from how there is no separation between men and women, in regards to communal sleeping areas. If the general reason for fewer women being employed in the mountaineering industry is a result of unsafe working conditions, and the unsafe working conditions derive not from accidents but from lacking separation of accommodation for female and male porters and guides, it is a problem with a reachable solution. One could imagine that the guesthouses offering accommodation for porters and guides could simple provide separate rooms for the different genders, reducing risks of violence and other forms of harassments. However, as Ang stated, strong community networks exists in the Khumbu region meaning that the problem recently discussed does not conclude why fewer women are employed in the mountaineering industry in the Khumbu region.

The women who do porter for households, guesthouses or teashops are not given salaries, similarly to porters within the mountaineering industry, as they do it for domestic use. They might contribute to the general economic income for families as

the supplies they bring are later sold. The reason behind this existing gender divide, of women not being employed similarly in the mountaineering industry, is not explained by the empirical material collected. As stated, the majority of respondents claimed there was no reason behind this divide, and one respondent thought that it might be an outcome of unsafe working conditions. As the gender divide in regards to the mountaineering industry is defined, it is not impossible to consider the unsafe working conditions for females as the explanation. And as the sampling method allowed for mainly male respondents, a rather one-sided perception was acknowledged. If the sampling was more even, in terms of the female and male interviewees, more concluding opinions and answers would most likely have provided a further in depth analysis in regards to this dilemma. However, as the gender divide is so distinct, it may contribute to why women tend to possess lower levels of English than men, as they are not necessarily needed to learn other languages in order to interact with tourists. Aspects from this section on gender division are included throughout the analysis as it relates to latter sections of welfare structures and welfare entitlements.

## 4.2 WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

After the avalanche in 2014, mentioned in section 1.1 and 1.4, Nepali mountain guides demanded action regarding the improvement of insurance and welfare in relation to their occupation. The Nepal Mountaineering Association, which functions as a union for Nepali mountain guides, pressurized the Nepali government successfully as rescue schemes were improved and insurance sums were raised in the Khumbu region. However, the government was, and still is, not able to function sufficiently as a welfare actor for families of deceased mountain guides. The government was not able to support effectively and instead, NGO's and private people sponsor education for the 31 children whose father died in the 2014 avalanche. The Nepal Mountaineering Association became a vocal point in this process and act to distribute economic contributions from the donors to the children. The process is named Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund (MDRES), and specifically states how much the different donors support, or donate, and whom they sponsor. The Himalayan Trust, The Sherpa Educational Fund, Benoit Chamoux

Foundation and a private person by the name of Ken Noguchi are the actors sponsoring this project.

The Himalayan Trust, who are part of the Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund, have worked for long, hence being well established in the Khumbu region, but merely focusing on providing and improving education and health care facilities for all the residents. It was only after the 2014 avalanche, and the critical result that followed, that they engaged directly in economically sponsoring children in need. The Sherpa Educational Fund and Benoit Chamoux Foundation, as well as Ken Noguchi, has for long have acted to provide education, via economic contributions, for a certain few in difference from the Himalayan Trust.

The president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, who participated in an interview, considered the operation to be successfully so far. Appropriate measures are taken as all the affected families, including children, are cared for. The president acknowledged, however, how the support and entitlements are unequal, as the 31 children are given different amounts of money by different foundations. The president still assured that all the children will be able to experience education until grade 12, meaning the end of high school, as a result of the entitlements given. The inequality is an outcome of former strategies performed by the different NGO's included in the MDRES. The Sherpa Educational Fund and Benoit Chamoux, as well as Ken Noguchi, had for long contributed economically in order to provide education for children. Therefore the NMA allowed the various NGO's to operate as before, and use similar strategies as before, and divided the 31 children among the four donors instead of dividing the economic contributions equally among the 31 children.

An interesting topic that arose whilst speaking to the president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association was how private people would contact the Nepal Mountaineering Association, wondering why their donations were not accounted for in the Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund report. It indicated that private people and sponsors would informally give money directly to some of the affected families, allowing further enhancement of the already unequal distribution of welfare entitlements. The inequality that exists may not necessarily be problematic as all the victim children of this particular accident are all experiencing

the same level and length of education, leaving no one excluded. The additional economic contributions experienced by a certain few of the affected families are justified as being a result of the various NGO's practicing different welfare strategies. The moral dilemma in the differentiation of economic support includes how families affected similarly are treated differently. A more logical, and somewhat universal (Titmuss, 1968), approach would include entitling all affected similarly, both in regards to educational support and economic contributions. However, as the Nepal Mountaineering Association regarded the NGO's involved with MDRES to function effectively, a changing in their current strategies may have resulted differently, and the Khumbu people would not have been satisfied with the provided welfare entitlements. And, the extra economic contributions, the extra informal economics donations experienced by a few of the affected families, can be considered still positive rather than negative as they enhance extra opportunities, even though it is only for a few. The inequalities among the affected families are at least not polarized to an extent where a few are aided whilst others are not. All affected families, including children, are experiencing essential entitlements such as education.

In addition to the Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund, the Nepal Mountaineering Association focuses on helping the wives of the deceased mountain guides to cope. All affected women are able to practice this entitlement. Strategies for this include training programs that aim to introduce the affected unemployed wives to the labor market. Trainings focus on strengthening skills in relation to the tourism industry, and can comprise how to successfully run a teahouse or hotel. This selection welfare approach is of importance as it allows the formerly unemployed women to engage in the labor market. However, as these training schemes are only offered after accidents occur, and after the male breadwinner has lost his life, they contribute to the inequalities among genders by adding another aspect of segregation between men and women. If similar preparation work was occurring beforehand and not as a result of accidents but rather in order to help unemployed women to engage in the labor market, less organizational welfare work, aiming to enhance lives of affected families, would arguably be required. The timing of the training programs results in an avoidance of mitigating work, by instead focusing on the aftermath of tragic accidents rather than aiming on how to prevent these tragic scenarios of families losing members and risking their livelihoods.

The gathered empirical material suggests that the existing NGO's as well as forms of private sponsorship, all part of MDRES and mentioned in section 3.3, that are constructed on misfortune, as the aid families who have been negatively affected by the 2014 avalanche, and aiming to enhance living standards are of positive matter.

We have so many organizations working in the Khumbu region. Many people have difficult life here in Khumbu, but it is better than the western region. Organizations make guides want to work here rather than in the West.

*Ang, engineer and former porter, 23.02.2015*

The non-governmental organizations and their operations are looked upon with great admiration and considered nearly essential for the Khumbu region to keep developing as well as remain attractive for locals. Relating the viewpoints of the respondents to the NGO's and private donors, and to the male breadwinner model raises an issue of gender divide or gender exclusion. Though the male breadwinner model may not apply in complete accuracy, there are still several elements that fit well to its description. The women in Khumbu do occasionally engage in providing an economic income for their family, but the majority handles merely domestic issues and leave economic income to be handled by their husbands. When a father and husband who formerly engaged in the mountaineering industry loses his life, the remainders of the family tend to be provided for by the various NGO's or private people. Education and domestic costs are covered. There seem to be no strings attached, meaning nothing is expected in return, and the women, who belong to the affected families, can keep working, look for new work and partake in training programs, meaning that the social benefits can function to include, and reintroduce people to the labor market, rather than create exclusion or segregation from the labor market (Esping-Andersen, 1990:163). And children being given educational support are not expected to achieve specific grades in order to further enjoy education.

#### 4.2.1 WELFARE ENTITLEMENTS

Discarding from the economic benefits provided and perhaps realistic terms, it can arguably be considered that these welfare institutions lack incorporation and do not analyze the situations on a holistic level. As Lewis (1992) discusses, that in regards to welfare it is often the case that women are treated unequal to men. Though the

welfare institutions have not necessarily created the gender divide that exists in the Khumbu region, it can be considered that they boost these structures. The Alex Lowe Foundation, another NGO not included in the MDRES that operates to enhance and instruct safety among mountain guides, conducts courses where the participants are mainly male. The NGO's included in the Mountaineering Disaster Relief And Educational Support Fund and the Nepali Mountaineering Association, who provides financial support for the affected families as well as other entitlements, focuses on benefitting mainly women and children, however only after the male breadwinners death.

We provide, if their economic condition is very poor. Then we provide training so that they can, or it will be easy for them live the rest of their lives. We provide trainings, or we sponsor them for the trainings. [...] Trainings like, if they want to open restaurants we provide cooking trainings for them. Or if they want to do something similar to that we sponsor them for the training.

*Dawa, secretary at the Nepal Mountaineering Association, 13.04.2015*

This answer was a response to the question of how wives of deceased mountain guides cope with socio-economic dilemmas. Dawa explained how the entitlements are provided to enhance the women's living standards and by adding opportunities. However, no such work is conducted before accidents occur, or for women whom do not have husbands occupied in the mountaineering industry. It could therefore be argued that the social provision creates a setting where women are somewhat dependent on welfare strategies focusing on their husbands' (Lewis, 1992), instead of experiencing entitlements of their own. Other than providing education, NGO's do not operate to enhance other social services for women pre-accidents occur.

This selection framework (Titmuss, 1968) that exist in the Khumbu, where only a few are aided, can be considered to function as children are not needed to support their only remaining parent (Walker & Wong, 2004:116) and can instead seize the opportunity of education hence obtaining a broader spectrum for future careers. Though it may be the case that selection is too narrow and excludes groups of people, the respondents did not consider this approach unfair as the end analysis of the

interviews concluded that the NGO's and private sponsors still act better and faster than the Nepali government, who may focus on a more universal approach, when it comes to welfare and social provision. Though other problems, like environmental pollution and gender issues, endure in the Khumbu, it seems as the death of mountain guides require, and are definitely given, more immediate attention. The existing NGO's, like The Himalayan Trust, and private sponsors, like Ken Noguchi, that operate to provide welfare are possible outcomes of both high accident risk and tourism. The social provision is not only of the selection kind, but the people targeted are selected perhaps out of interest. Aiming to aid representatives of the mountaineering industry arguably allows for the industry to blossom and attract more tourist climbers as appropriate measures are taken once accidents occur. Death and the consequences of it, in this case being economic insecurity for entire families, is without doubt a serious matter and a problem in the Khumbu that should be dealt with properly. The occurring funding is helping but could perhaps be considered as compensation for all the lost lives caused by tourists needing assistance to ascent mountains. Were the risk level lower, hence fewer deaths, it remains hard to conclude whether as high interest in establishing foundations and helping the Khumbu region to develop would exist.

#### 4.2.2 INFORMAL WELFARE

The participatory observation phase contributed to understanding social structures on a community level, including informalities of welfare, and what affect the society has on individuals (Trigg, 2001:65). Favors and gifts between neighbors and friends were given as well as returned. The participatory observation proved an example of this as Nepali guides often lead tourists to guest and teahouses owned by their friends. In return for tourists' spending money at the different houses, the guides bringing them there are given free food and accommodation. Another common occurrence was children helping their elders (Tao, 2004:131-133), functioning as a form of informal welfare for entire families. The scenario did not force children to quit school, nor avoid further education. The assistance was given during their free time and included general chores such as domestic help and kitchen support.

The informal welfare that exists in the Khumbu region was a topic often discussed with informants. If accident would occur, the community as whole would engage and help out the families in need.

Yeah it is a common thing. We call it like neighbor, so when there is a problem everyone comes and helps out. [...] But it stays in the villages. In our areas. But if we know someone very well then yes, but it can be too far.

*Bire, guest house owner and former porter, 04.03.2014*

The respondent describes how people in within different communities will help each others. The aid and support however, would be of general kind, including help with domestic issues and assistance of smaller tasks, and would not increase the economic income of affected families in significant ways. It is unclear whether this communal welfare, on its own, would act sufficient enough to allow children to experience higher education. The informal ways, however, surely contribute to some sense of communal inclusion and may therefore enhance, or increase, the safety felt by mountain guides operating on high altitudes and being exposed to high risks. Knowing that family and friends will act in caring ways if accidents occur might be relieving and contribute in overlooking the high risks of engaging in the mountaineering industry. Therefore, one could imagine that the welfare selection approach, provided by the NGO's included in MDRES, operating to deliver schooling and increased economic income for families, in relation to the informal welfare structures, which the community provides by offering a sense of inclusion, contributes to why male breadwinners exposes themselves to a high risk occupation as they engage in the mountaineering industry.

#### 4.2.3 DEATH, INJURY AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk mitigation was commonly discussed during the interviews. Respondents were rather one sided and argued that climbing will remain a dangerous sport and forms of mitigations are hopeful rather than realistic. Mount Everest, the highlight of the Himalayan mountain range, is truly respectable but relatively tranquil in comparison with other mountains in the Khumbu region. The semi-structured interviews identified the two major dangers on Mount Everest, being altitude sickness and the Khumbu Icefall. Altitude sickness cannot be prevented, nor predicted as it attacks both

inexperienced mountaineers as well as experienced guides. It is perhaps something to acknowledge and accept once ascending higher mountains. The danger of the Khumbu Icefall, where the avalanche on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April in 2014 occurred, is somewhat different. Everyone ascending from the Nepali side must cross this treacherous part meaning an exposure to avalanches and glacier cracks. However, tourist mountaineers merely need to cross this section two times, on the way up and on the way down. The local Nepali guides are forced to travel cross several times in order to carry the luggage further up the mountain. This dilemma increase the exposure time for the Nepali people, which may have contributed to the fact, that only Nepali guides, and assistant guides, died on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2014.

Mitigating the high risk on the Khumbu icefall is problematic due to its location. Many of the interviewees considered the icefall as something of enjoyment for tourist climbers, but as they themselves had already conquered it several times, it is merely a high-risk area that would rather be avoided.

Maybe, but it is not fair to stop climbs to Everest. They would also loose a lot of revenue. I think they should look for alternatives for the Khumbu icefall. Maybe a cable car to take luggage to camp one. People would still walk. Sherpas job is mainly higher up at Everest. So if there was an alternative to bringing luggage it would be better. It would mean that accidents would be less frequent as most of the accidents are in the Khumbu icefall.

*Kami, doctor at Khunde hospital, 23.02.2015*

Kami is hoping for modern solutions, relieving the ones who frequently travel across the Khumbu icefall of risk, by introducing a cable car system that can transport luggage to higher camps on Mount Everest. It is a noteworthy idea, as this solution would not hinder tourists from experiencing the entire climb of Mount Everest, and would allow local Nepali guides to avoid a high-risk area. However, such a solution would be immensely costly, and could compromise the nature experience of Mount Everest, perhaps reducing the number of climbers.

Judging from the gathered empirical material, it is not crystal clear how people perceive the risk factor. The respondents were divided and one half considered the risk of climbing to be great enough to quit, in fear of losing their lives and livelihood for their families. The other half acknowledge the risk, considered climbing on high altitude to be of great danger, but kept on exposing themselves in order to provide an income for themselves and their families.

Yes, we have a very strong family bond. All the money I make go to my sons and their education. In 2006 I was part of an expedition and witnessed an avalanche killing many, so I had to promise my family that I would not do something like that again, so I stopped working on high altitudes.

*Bire, trekking guide and former mountain guide, 24.02.2015*

Bire explained how he had promised his family never to guide on high altitude again as he was part of an expedition who barely survived another avalanche on another mountain a couple of years back. As coping was part of discussions, the people who kept climbing considered the existing NGO's as well functioning welfare institutions. Therefore, some of the respondents did not worry about socio-economic insecurity for their families if death occurred, meaning that the current welfare structures are creating a sense of security by the so far conducted work, especially in relation to MDRES.

The assessment of risk, whether it is culturally or socially constructed (Zinn, 2004) resulting in if the inhabitants of the Khumbu region consider accidents, risks and death differently, was not directly discussed during the semi-structured interviews. The concept of risk was instead only conversed and discussed in relation to injury and death. One could, however, imagine that the culture, especially among the Sherpa people, has had an impact on the danger climbers are exposed to. As discussed earlier, the term Sherpa does not merely represent an ethnicity but often includes a stereotypical description. Whether the Sherpa people remain a mountainous people, tough, enduring and fit for aiding tourists, or in reality find it difficult to uphold this ideal (Stevens, 1993) and serviced minded reputation is not a certainty. But ascending a mountain may, among them and other mountain guides, not be regarded as more dangerous than driving a car on a highway.

#### 4.2.4 SOCIAL CARE AND WELFARE PLURALISM

The discussed and analyzed welfare providers relate to the concept of social care. The work conducted by the NGO's and the NMA, and the support provided by strong family structures, focus on social care and how to enhance interconnectedness as well as creating social relations among the Khumbu inhabitants. This does not merely involve the process of schooling and the security of knowing that health care is available, but the inclusion within, and among, families and kin. The communal inclusion, the social care, and the welfare provided by NGO's, the community and strong family bonds, are the strongest actors of providing welfare in the Khumbu region. This welfare scenario operates with characteristics of welfare pluralism (Evers, 1995). In the Khumbu region, merely family, the community and the various NGO's are actively present as welfare actors. The state is close to absent and the market has marginal impact. Evers (1995) emphasizes the importance the 'third sector' in regards to welfare pluralism. The third sector, according to Evers, is a democratic accomplishment of civil society organizing itself in order to improve social-economic conditions by focusing on essentialities or necessities. In the Khumbu region, high-risk working conditions have resulted in families suffering from socio-economic difficulties. The NGO's previously mentioned and the NMA along with strong family and community networks acknowledge this problem and operate in solving it. The majority of the interviewees concluded how these actors operate appropriately, hence operating with characteristics of the claim made by Evers.

However, affected families may be effectively supported as they avoid socio-economic dilemmas post the breadwinner's death, but the strategy, the selection approach, that exists avoids battling the problem at its root, being risk mitigation. Nor does the strategy guarantee similar support for families who may be affected by accidents in the near future. Instead, the selection approach conducted by the previously mentioned actors may hinder other welfare actors, such as the state, to more actively involve itself in effectively helping the Khumbu region.

[...] Many different foundations show support, donations for children and so on. They work well but I think the most important thing is to think forward. What about next year? They need to plan more. The Khumbu icefall will still be there, and therefore more avalanches. Most important is the life of the

people. Many foundations focus on the families and not on making Everest more secure.

*Kami, doctor at Khunde hospital, 23.02.2015*

Kami acknowledges how organizations and foundations help affected families in the Khumbu region by economic contributions. However, as long as the mountaineering industry thrives, accidents and disasters are bound to happen. To not reflect upon this will result in more lives being lost. The current institutions may have derived as a response to a problem needing attention and not being solved. One could however imagine these current structures to hinder other, more long term or sustainable, welfare institutions of being introduced and holding ground, and even battling the root problem of security on high altitudes.

#### 4.3 INTEGRATED WELFARE SYSTEM IN THE KHUMBU REGION

The Khumbu region's welfare strategies, and its social structures, described in relation to the eclectic theoretical frameworks adapted for this thesis can be analyzed and described separately, albeit can be analyzed more holistically, or in manner of how they effect each other or how they operate in accordance with one and another.

Men engaging in the mountaineering industry act as the main source of economic income for entire families. The occupation field that they engage in is of high danger risk, and occurring accidents tend to affect Nepali mountaineers rather than tourist climbers as the Nepali guides suffer longer accident exposure time. The danger aspect is overlooked, as mountain guides are able to ensure livelihood for their entire family. However, as mountaineering accidents and natural disasters occur, Nepali mountain guides die as a result of their high-risk occupation. These tragic events leave entire families with socio-economic dilemmas as they loose their source of income. The third sector, or the mentioned NGO's, in regards to the welfare pluralism, steps in as the main welfare actor, along with strong community structures, in providing welfare for affected families, or families who lost their breadwinner. NGO's and kinship welfare actors function appropriately in supporting affected families economically, and allowing children to experience education and mothers to involve in preparation training for further engagement or reintroduction into the labor market. Therefore, the

welfare provided cannot merely be described as economic entitlements but rather as social care (Razavi, 2000). Not all the inhabitants of the Khumbu region do experience the same amount of welfare entitlements. Instead the current approach is of the selection kind, meaning only a certain few are entitled, in this scenario being families who have lost their male breadwinner to the mountaineering industry.

To consider the current welfare strategies and structures integrated as one system approves for more general speculations. The Khumbu region's current welfare approach befittingly identifies the crucial issue of deceased mountain guides. In addition the approach does well solving the aftermath of the issue as affected families do not suffer noticeable hardships, other than having lost a family member, as socio-economic dilemmas are handled in rather sophisticated manners. The existing NGO's have managed to contribute to the families who suffered a loss of a family breadwinner in 2014 by economic contributions to families, trainings for unemployed wives who wish to enter the labor market, and by allowing children to experience education. Risk mitigation, however, is a topic harder to evaluate and analyze, being that mountaineering accidents and natural disasters on high altitudes will arguably always be present and cannot be prevented to a full extent. With that being said, activities focusing on risk mitigation are not completely absent as The Alex Lowe foundation operate to enhance mountaineering security for Nepali guides, and the other NGO's, the ones contributing to the MDRES, enable children to avoid exposure of high danger risk labor by providing schooling, hence allowing children to not necessarily follow family patterns that may include becoming a Nepali mountain guide.

Aside from the positive results, in regards to the integrated system analysis is the more questionable outcomes or negative aspects. Firstly, the problems being battled is naturally a crucial problem, however over shines other problematic scenarios that considerably too need attention. This includes improvement of infrastructure and creation of alternative transportations measure, rather than people carrying goods far across mountain ranges. Secondly, the fact that someone needs to die in order for welfare entitlements to function effectively may be considered unethical. Welfare entitlements could, and perhaps should, exists in the Khumbu region discarding the mountaineering industry. Lastly, many of the current strategies act in similarity with

quick fixes (Smith, 2002), and focus economically on rather small issues rather than analyzing in broader regards by putting little focus on mitigating work, such as the root problem of enhancing safety for Nepali mountain guides.

With that being said, the Khumbu region still experience sufficient and effective welfare in regards to the mountaineering by acting appropriately in providing socio-economic services for families who have suffered the loss of a breadwinner. The effectiveness has created a setting where Nepali guides prefer working in the Khumbu region, rather than in Western Nepal, as the welfare approaches are so efficient. In addition, the Khumbu region is one of the wealthier regions in all of Nepal (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998:65-68), allowing for further institutionalizing of welfare structures and perhaps improvements of mitigating work.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The existing scenarios, including the dilemmas of welfare in regards to the mountaineering industry, described are of complexity. They are of significance as local people in the Khumbu region die whilst providing livelihood for themselves and their families by helping tourists ascending mountains. Therefore, there is a need of addressing this problem and examine the current social structures as well as the work conducted by the existing welfare institutions.

The first issue regarding the social structures is that of gender divide in relation to mountaineering. As women are not only excluded from the mountaineering industry but also excluded from welfare equations they become dependent on their husband's welfare entitlements rather than being given entitlements of their own. Secondly, entitlements are given after accidents occur, resulting in less mitigation work before these situations emerge. Instead, the main focus could be figuring out ways of preventing the accidents from ever happening.

Another dilemma regarding the welfare entitlements is that of its construction. The institutions are based upon interest, and communal kindness, and do therefore not guarantee immediate action or proper support. One could imagine a lacking interest in the future, both by NGO's and the community, if the popularity of mountaineering decreases, leaving the affected with very little or perhaps nothing. It is possible to

consider the welfare strategies to be non-sustainable and may have future problems of enduring. This paper does not intend to argue that the current relation between tourists and the locals, engaged in the mountaineering industry, is of exploiting matter and that donations purpose are only to function as compensation. Tourists, or former tourists, have contributed to the NGO's and the social provision foundations, and the entitlements provided by the NGO's do not merely function as compensation entitlements for the affected families, but do help the Khumbu region in developing. However, more institutionalized welfare approaches and firmly based welfare strategies may provide for more long-term solutions.

With that being said, the other existing organizational work that functions for the communities rather than the individuals, contribute to both strengthening of social structures, as in being less divided, and provide opportunities for young people. Financially aiding the schools in the Khumbu region allow children not to necessarily follow in their parent's footsteps, or other pre-determined structures, and instead seek higher education and apply for different labor fields. This includes both sexes, and leaves family statuses to not matter to a greater extent. It could become a reality that the gender structures and work insecurity, experienced due to high danger risk, in the Khumbu will be reduced, and further creation of more reliable welfare institutions that do not merely help when death occurs.

Mountaineering remains dangerous and mitigation tactics are hard to establish. The Alex Lowe Foundation, which provides safety trainings, is conducting important work as they are trying to minimize the risk, by educating mountain guides. The risk factor will endure high in the Khumbu region, as dangerous events on high altitude cannot be avoided fully, but preparation work and mountain safety are essential aspects that should be dealt with properly. The work conducted by other NGO's can also be considered as mitigating work as they focus on enhancing a wider range of labor possibilities. The Himalayan Trust's focus on improving education allows children not to be predestined to engage in the mountaineering industry, and therefore avoiding experiencing high-risk exposure, as higher education as well as different labor fields can be pursued.

In relation to welfare pluralism, the earlier discussed NGO's have taken it upon themselves to act as main welfare actors in the Khumbu region. The actors of market and state have not acted accordingly in solving the issue faced by families affected by a breadwinners' death. The gathered empirical material implied that state welfare is close to non-existent and the residents of the Khumbu region value the government welfare strategies with low regards, claiming that the government is corrupt. In addition, as Nepal is a country suffering from high levels of poverty (World Bank, 2013), inadequate investments in social policies often exist (Croissant, 2004), meaning less effectiveness and efficiency of welfare provided by the state. The analysis indicates that affected families can neither, or choose not to, rely on market-based welfare, perhaps due to its costly nature or as the NGO's operates adequate enough. This scenario of NGO's being the main actor of welfare provision may not provide welfare entitlements for all the inhabitants of the Khumbu region. But in addition with family, as a welfare actor, they have acted effectively in order to battle a problem that needed attention, by ensuring livelihood and social care for entire families, by contributing economically, and by providing education and trainings.

The suggested eclectic framework functioned appropriately for this aim and operated accordingly with the investigation and latter analysis, as well as discussion. It included evaluating and analyzing the applied research question, of how families who lost their family breadwinner cope with socio-economic difficulties. This thesis does not provide definite improvements or solutions for the future, however identifies areas of implications where improvements could be made. It gives deep insights to social structures existing in the Khumbu region of Nepal and how people rely on, and appreciates, welfare. Families cope with the loss of a breadwinner mainly through the support of NGO's, in relation to smaller contributions made via family patters. The economic dilemmas faced by families are usually solved and children, as well as mothers, will experience education and training. The welfare institutions do hold both negative and positive sides. They are perceived with admiration from the locals and help the Khumbu region to develop as schools and hospitals are improved. The negative aspects, however, include how their tactics may not be sustainable, or not long-term, and that the focus is directed towards men.

Further research is suggested to put a larger focus on the gender divide in the Khumbu region of Nepal and to a greater extent analyze why so few women engage in the mountaineering industry. Another topic worth investigating includes analyzing the mitigating work further or how accidents relating to the mountaineering industry in the Khumbu region can be reduced.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

This guide is a summary of the conducted interviews. It includes the major themes and the most commonly asked questions in relation to the themes. All interviews were held in similarity with the interview guide appearing below.

#### General Information

- What is your name and occupation?
- Where are you from?
- Do you have a wife and children?

#### The mountaineering industry, risk, and coping

- How long have you worked as a porter/guide?
- Is there the difference between guide and porters? Socially? Economically?
- Do you do high altitude or risk filled trekking or climbing?
- And do you consider your occupation as dangerous?
- Does the high-risk level affect you in any ways?
- What would happen to your family if you got in an accident?
- Did you know anyone present at the 2014 avalanche?
- How did it affect his family?
- I was wondering about the wives and women, who were married to mountain guides who tragically died in the avalanche. What do they do now?
- What does the family do now? How do they cope?

#### Non-governmental and governmental work

- What is your opinion on the NGO's working here?
- When it comes to the NGO's, do you know a lot about them? A lot of the people I have talked to have said that they do a better job than the Nepali government. Is that also your opinion?
- Do you think the government can work to prevent accidents?
- Or do you think they can help in similar ways as the NGO's do?
- In your opinion, do the organizations who help families of deceased climbers function well?
- I have heard that new organization after the 2014 avalanche focus on helping children. However, not sure how well they function. Do you know?
- There are many organizations working here. Organizations helping children who's dad died in the mountaineering industry. Is it a big problem?
- And if they fail, what happens then?

#### Tourism

- When it comes to villages like Namche that is based on tourism and different from Khunde and Khumjung. So do you think that the same welfare would exist without the high levels of tourism?
- Would you say that there is something bad about tourism?

### Risk mitigation

- Do you think it is possible to take away the risk from mountaineering? Would people still climb it then?
- Do you think there can be alternatives to the Khumbu icefall? To mitigate the risk?
- Is it possible to perform preparation work in order to reduce the risk level?

### Community structures

- Is it a common thing that the community helps each other out, if accidents occur? Also when it is not too serious?

### Education

- So the training is similar to education I guess?
- For example, when it comes to sponsoring the kids. Is there something expected in return? Lets say you give money for education, do the kids need to get very high grades or is going to school enough?

## 7.2 LIST OF INTERVIEWEES AND ORGANIZATIONS

### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Names included in this table are fictive. The list is presented in chronological order.

NAME	PROFESSION	RECORD TYPE	DURATION IN MINUTES
LHAKPA	ELECTRICIAN, FORMER GUIDE	DETAILED NOTES	30-35
DAMBERJIT	PORTER	DETAILED NOTES	20-25
ANG	ENGINEER, FORMER PORTER	AUDIO RECORDED	16:41
KAMI	DOCTOR, KHUNDE HOSPITAL	AUDIO RECORDED	10:25
ANG	FORMER HEAD TEACHER, KHUMJUNG SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	12:27
ASHOK	PORTER	DETAILED NOTES	15-20
TSERING	MOUNTAIN GUIDE	DETAILED NOTES	15-20
LHAKPA	MOUNTAIN GUIDE	DETAILED NOTES	10-15
BIRE	TREKKING GUIDE	DETAILED NOTES	10-15
SHAMBU	MOUNTAIN GUIDE	DETAILED NOTES	10-15
BIKUMAR	TREKKING GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	15:25
KAMI	FORMER ICE DOCTOR	DETAILED NOTES	10
TSERING	GUEST HOUSE OWNER, FORMER PORTER	AUDIO RECORDED	17:15
PASANG	HEAD TEACHER, KHUMJUNG SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	15:52

KAMCHI	GUEST HOUSE OWNER, FORMER GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	7:51
BIRE	GUEST HOUSE OWNER, FORMER PORTER	AUDIO RECORDED	26:33
ANGEM	TEACHER, KHUMJUNG SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	8:26
NAWANG	RETIRED MOUNTAIN GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	36:00
DAWA	HEAD TEACHER, NAMCHE BAZAAR SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	15:43
KASIMANG	ASSISTANT MOUNTAIN GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	8:26
BAWEEN	TEACHER, NAMCHE SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	22:37
BHAWANA	MOUNTAIN GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	9:06
NAWANG	MOUNTAIN GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	10:06
NIMA	TREKKING GUIDE	AUDIO RECORDED	6:18
DAWANG	TEACHER, NAMCHE SCHOOL, AND INVOLVED WITH THE ALEX LOWE FOUNDATION	AUDIO RECORDED	8:25
ANG	TEACHER, NAMCHE SCHOOL	AUDIO RECORDED	7:40
	PRESIDENT OF THE NEPAL MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION	AUDIO RECORDED	24:43
DAWA	SECRETARY AT THE NEPAL MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION	AUDIO RECORDED	5:06
NIMA	FINANCIAL ADVISOR AT THE HIMALAYAN TRUST	AUDIO RECORDED	21:01

All audio recordings, detailed notes, and transcribed versions of interviews are available upon request.

#### LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

- The Himalayan Trust
- The Nepal Mountaineering Association
- Alex Lowe Foundation