

## Status of Sex Trafficking in India: A Conceptual Paper

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### Abstract

This is a conceptual paper to investigate status of sex trafficking in India. The trafficking of women and girls has persisted a social crime that maintains its status despite being unlawful. Since it prevails, it needs to be investigated to understand the effects and consequences of the same on survivors who are trying to get their life back on track. Asian countries have the most significant number of sex slaves, and India is found to be the hub of this crime in Asia. It generates 343 billion dollars a year in the country. It is difficult to know precisely how many girls and women who are trafficked in the country, but the estimation is that it may involve up to 27 million people. India's sex trafficking is thriving. Poverty is the most significant factor. Promises of false employment tempt defenseless women and girls, and also some parents are in great need and sell their daughters to traffickers. Many girls, after the rescue, spend time in a rehabilitation center, which provides health care and social assistance, and additionally, skill - building training, literacy to help them to reintegrate into society. Nevertheless, in returning to their communities, they face high - level of social ignominy aimed at sex - trafficked girls. Survivors need primary care and also programs that equip them to get a job before reintegrating them into society. Reintegration cannot be complete if survivors are not equipped to earn a living with dignity. The following article provides an overview of sex trafficking in the country and addresses implications for working with survivors.

**Keywords:** Sex Trafficking; Forced Prostitution; Sex Trafficking Survivors; Mental Health

### Introduction

#### Problem statement

Sex trafficking is a hideous crime where small girls are commercialized into prostitution [1]. Those girls and women trapped in the sex trade suffer indescribable brutalities such as imprisonment, rape, and mental and physical abuse to list a few.

#### Purpose and inquiry questions

This conceptual paper brings an overview of sex trafficking in the country, and also seeks to provide an understanding and insight of the psychological brutality girls and women go through and what is needed to do to help them to recover the traumatic experience of being sexually exploited in the sex industry.

1. Why is sex trafficking flourishing in India?
2. How is life for trafficked women?
3. What happens after the rescued?

#### Significance of the study

In a study done in Kolkata, India, participants described that they had limited knowledge of trafficking prior the trafficking experience, and this made them more vulnerable to fall victim of sex trafficking [2]. So, studying this topic is of great importance to bring awareness to society, professionals, and academicians, and also to help those women and girls who are struggling to overcome the traumatic experienced being trafficked. Research on this topic is needed to enhance understanding of the best ways to protect, serve, and support survivors of sex trafficking while they search for justice. Girls and women who are trapped in sexual slavery are members of society and do not deserve to be commercialized as merchandise in the sex industry.

#### Implications of the study

Victims of sex trafficking undergo abuse, malnutrition, poor living conditions, and poor hygiene during entrapment [3]. Furthermore, their medical care is frequently neglected, thereby cul-

minating in many negative as well as dangerous, physical, and psychological consequences [3]. Knowing what survivors went through and their physical and psychological conditions will enable organizations and those who assist them to address their needs effectively.

### Summary of the theoretical framework

#### Psychoanalytic approach to trauma

According to Bernard [4], Trauma is a subjective experience. What is traumatic depends on the person's ability to cope with the stressor; because of that, psychoanalysis values the individual experience. Moreover, trauma is not always about a single event. It does not mean that a child that was sexually or physically abused one time is not traumatized, but the abuse that happens over time has a more significant impact on the victim. It is believed that psychological trauma is more painful than physical trauma.

The American Psychoanalytic Association has interest in helping victims of human trafficking and encourages partners around the world to call on the expertise of psychoanalytic mental health professionals in developing in-depth treatment including long-term relationship-based psychotherapy for human trafficking survivors. Significant treatment requires a compassionate approach to the whole person. Psychoanalytic therapy is especially useful in treating psychological disorders resulting in complex trauma, which includes physical abuses, abduction, sexual abuse, and subjugation [5].

#### Methods for data collection and analysis of literature

This paper used only secondary data from existing literature. Various methods were utilized to select and analyze literature.

The researcher conducted a search using four databases to identify research pertaining to psychology. The databases used were Google Scholar, EBSCO, JSTOR, and ProQuest, and the keywords used were human sexual trafficking, sex trafficking, sex trafficking survivors, and sex trafficking in India and forced prostitution. Those databases were used to search articles and full papers that have been published between 2008 and 2019, and in English language. Out of 100 research papers, 30 were found to be relevant to answer the research questions of this paper. All the papers selected were thoroughly analyzed, and the topics have to deal with sex trafficking in India, physical and psychological abuse women go through in sexual slavery, life after the rescue and their overall needs.

#### Discussion and analysis of the literature on sex trafficking

The business of sexual slavery is a form of industry that generates billions of dollars of profit [6]. It is higher than nearly any

industry worldwide, illegal or otherwise [7]. The estimation is that one child or woman is traded for sexual exploration every sixty seconds. Asian countries have the most significant number of sex slaves. Sex trafficking has become a highly profitable business, with victims frequently being re-trafficked several times [7].

Human trafficking is an atrocious act, and unfortunately, it is widespread all over the world [8]. The United Nations [9], defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transfer, transportation, receipt or harboring of persons using duress or threat or different kinds of coercion, of fraud, of abduction, of trickery, the misuse of power or helplessness; the receiving or giving of benefits or payments to gain the acceptance of someone to have control over another human being with the intention of exploitation. It must include, at least the sexual exploitation of other person or exploitation for forced prostitution.

Sex trafficking comes under human trafficking, and as specified by the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), implies utilizing people for commercial sex induced by fraud, coercion, or by force [10]. Preference for trafficked women takes place because they are powerless and are also seen as 'other' and consequently regarded with contempt, and their submissiveness and vulnerability is perceived as an appealing trait [10].

The estimation is that 20.9 million children and adults are merchandise being commercialized worldwide into sexual servitude, bonded labor, as well as forced labor [11]. Approximately two million children are bought and sold each year in the global sex industry. In human trafficking, women and girls comprise 96% of victims for sexual servitude [12]. The trafficking of girls and women for sexual slavery is included in the most well-recognized forms of trafficking [13].

#### Sex trafficking in India

India is considered to be alongside Myanmar and Libya as the most dangerous place for women regarding human trafficking, which includes forced labor, forced marriage, domestic servitude, and sexual slavery. It was registered 15,000 trafficking cases by India in 2016 [14]. Sex trafficking has become a billion-dollar business in the country. In Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai, small girls as young as nine years old are repeatedly raped by eight or more men every night [1]. India is the most dangerous place for women. It is more dangerous than war-torn Syria and Afghanistan [14]. Canton [14] stated that, concerning the trafficking of women and sexual violence, India is the worse overall.

It is difficult to know precisely how many girls and women are trafficked in the country, but the estimation is that it may involve up to 27 million people. India's sex trafficking is thriving [15]. It has

increased by 22%, and the majority of sex - trafficked being young women and children [16]. Poverty is the most significant factor [17]. Promises of false employment tempt defenseless women and girls, and also some parents are in great need and sell their daughters to traffickers [15,18]. It is believed that the migration of large numbers of men into growing cities and rapid urbanization creates a demand for commercial sex in India, as well as gender imbalance due sex - selective abortion practices have made a young generation of men to have very little hope of encountering female partners. The caste system worsens the problem because those who are trafficked into the sex trade come from underprivileged parts of Indian society [15,16].

According to Matussek [19], gender inequality, cultural norms, and socioeconomic factors enable sex trafficking to flourish in India and serve as a kind of brutality against women. Women are not safe in the country [14]. Gender inequality grants man and woman contrasting rights and access to basic needs of life. That is, men are considered superior to women [14,19]. Religious, cultural, and tribal traditions do not favor women [14]. Cultural norms cause vulnerability and oppression of women because many traditions are favorable to men [19]. Socio - economic inequality plays a part in the fact that women in India most often face a lack of education as well as the absence of job opportunities. These culminate in the push and pull of girls and women in sex trafficking [19]. Canton [14] reported that poverty is not the only factor that works against women in the country, but because it is a male - dominated society.

### Status of sex trafficking in India

Around 80% of the trafficking in persons worldwide is for sexual exploitation. The remaining is for forced labor, and India is the hub of this atrocious crime in Asia [20]. According to The International Labor Organization (ILO), it is estimated that around 1.39 million people are victimized in the sex industry around the world [21]. Usually, girls associated with sex work in Asia were forced by social inequality and economic circumstances. Most of them do not get involved voluntarily, but by force or were deceived by traffickers [22].

Approximately 65 million people are in slavery in India. According to India's National Commission for Women, 62 percent of women in the sex industry are from underprivileged castes [21]. Gender inequity and patriarchal traditions in India have culminated in the victimization of women, aggravating their vulnerability to labor and sexual exploitation [19,21]. Unfortunately, there is a demand for more victims. According to ILO, the estimation is that up to twelve thousand young girls are trapped and trafficked annually from Nepal to India for forced prostitution [21].

India's Ministry of Home Affairs states that 90 percent of sex trafficking in India is internal, that is, from rural areas to urban centers and from the poor states to the rich states [21]. Globalization and economic boost have caused a growth in non-brothel kind of sex work in India, especially in bars, massage parlors, and hotels [21]. The commercial sex industry in India generates income of up to 343 billion dollars a year. The sex industry in Mumbai is one of the largest destinations in the country for trafficked girls [23].

Young women and girls, mainly from Northeast of India are lured with promises of employment and education by the agents and are taken from their homes, and then sold in faraway states of India for sexual exploitation [18,20]. Also, girls and young women from marginalized groups such as Dalits and economically deprived females are significantly represented among sex - trafficked victims [16].

Corruption is a significant factor that keeps going sex trafficking in India. A study by the National Human Rights Commission revealed that policemen regularly frequented the brothels surveyed, and "free" services were given to politicians, police, traffickers, and legislators reciprocally for safeguarding and to keep the business going [21].

### What happens to the survivor? Physical and emotional

Trafficked women are vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse [24]. Zimmerman, *et al.* [25] carried out a study on rescued women in post - trafficking services in Europe and found that 95% of the participants underwent sexual or physical abuse during trafficking experience. The typical physical symptoms were back pain, headache, feeling quickly tired, dizzy spells, memory difficulty, pelvic pain, and gynecological infections. Mental health symptoms were depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and hostility [13,25]. Moreover, positive emotions were found to be lower in this population, and consequently, lower well being, and slightly lower attribute of gratitude [26].

Levine[27] states that the most common mental illnesses found in sex trafficking survivors are depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety disorder. There are other mental issues such as social stigmatization, feelings of hopelessness, and poor sleep. A study on sex trafficking survivors conducted in the United States shows that "being a victim of sex trafficking was associated with being voiceless, vulnerable, broken, hopeless, powerless, unworthy, controlled and scared" [28]. Also, there is a high prevalence of HIV among sex - trafficked females [16,29].

Hossain, *et al.* [13] conducted a study on mental health care of sex - trafficked victims in countries from the European continent, and their study highlights the importance of assessing duration and severity of trafficking - related abuses and the need for sufficient recovery time. Sexual violence and injury during trafficking experience were linked with a high - level of PTSD. More time in sexual slavery was related to a high level of anxiety and depression [13,27].

### Society and family

Saunders' study stated the framework of sex trafficking as modern - day slavery, and the prevalence of violence has made it progressively possible to advance toward the issue of sex trafficking as a human right violation. The use of sex trafficking breaks the fundamental human right, and therefore the human rights procedure is crucial in addressing the needs of the females affected [30,31].

According to Simkhada [22] many girls, after being rescued, spend time in a rehabilitation center, which provides social assistance and health care to trafficked girls. Additionally, these girls are given skill - building training, literacy to assist them to be reintegrated into society [32]. Nevertheless, in returning to their communities, they face high-level of social humiliation aimed at sex - trafficked girls. Often, not only the community but also the family members condemn their moral and reject them [21]. They know that people look on them with contempt and consequently offer no aspiration for a life with dignity [21,33].

Tan [34] says that sex trafficking survivors believe they are dirty, their value has been lost, and they have a feeling that they will never recover their dignity and self - respect in society. However, in a safe and non - judgmental environment, many girls began to comprehend that it was not their fault that they were trafficked and exploited into the sex trade [34]. Art therapy has given them a chance to share their stories freely, and as a result, they felt less isolated from society because of the sense of solidarity, community, and strength that were created in the group [34].

In a study done in Mumbai's red - light brothel district, a participant mustered the courage to visit her family members, but her parents kicked her out [35]. Another participant described her situation, saying, "After your honor is gone, nobody will ask about you, not even people in your village. They have forgotten about you" [35]. Numerous trafficked women have felt as if they have been defiled and that they are "dirty" [36]. "They were repulsed by what had taken place, felt contaminated, and believed that this contamination was visible to others" [36]. Many women who have

been sex - trafficked have feelings of self - disgust and distressing humiliation concerning the acts they have been forced to engage and the condition they were in [36].

### Spirituality

Howell [37] said that spiritual people are optimist, gracious, self - actualized, and compassionate. Spirituality is a quest for the sacred. Prayer, for example, may bring out feelings of gratitude, compassion, and hope, and these have a good effect on the entire well being [37]. Mc Carthy [38] conducted a study on factors to consider when helping sex trafficking survivors, and spirituality was seen as a component that brings hope, resources and also provides a supportive and helpful community for them. Many of the participants said that if it was not for God, they could not have done it so far. Religious faith is a source of strength for the recovery of survivors [38,39].

Mc Carthy [38] reported that the spiritual side of the survivor is affected by the traumatic experience of being enslaved in the sex industry and that the spiritual side has to be taken into consideration while treating them. It means that, for the treatment to be effective, it has to be a holistic approach. That is "...because we are people that are body, soul and spirit ...if we do not get to the spirit of the person, we miss a part of their healing" (p. 48). Likewise, Ide and Mather [32] found that spirituality was beneficial for sex trafficking survivors.

### What has to be done for sex trafficked survivors?

The protective homes for rescued women in India house them in places that look like a prison. They are confined in the walled compound without any contact with the outside world. They are kept as criminals [40]. There is a need to protect them after the rescue, but at the same time, they should feel they are free from bondage. How to protect them at this stage without taking their freedom is quite complicated. The government has to protect them from falling into the hand of the traffickers again, and at the same time, the rescued women need to feel they have gained their liberty back [40].

A study by Simkhada [22] reveals that stronger strategy and policy along with political obligation prevails critical. There is a need to empower girls rather than seeking only to safeguard them. Gender - based maltreatment of women and girls, as well as poverty, elevates the possibility of sex trafficking [19].

### Reintegration

There is not adequate measure done to rehabilitate and reintegrate rescued girls [21]. The failure in this measure leads many

survivors to fall again in the hands of traffickers. Furthermore, there is an interest in returning survivors to be reunited with their families and reintegrating them in society. However, they face stigma in their communities [33]. Also, many of them were trafficked by their acquaintances or family members [33]. So, going back to their communities put them at risk of being re-trafficked [21]

According to Dahal and Swahnberg [41], the creation of a new identity for survivors, other than a sex trafficking survivor is of great importance for successful reintegration. Failure in giving the survivor a new identity during the reintegration process turns the reintegration unsuccessful. The lack of livelihood opportunities, along with a lack of skills, has made it hard for survivors to have a new identity to live a new life [41]. Reintegration cannot be complete if survivors are not equipped to earn a living with dignity in the society they are.

### Integral care of the victims of sex trafficking

Counts [33] stated that stigma is a significant obstacle to survivors' recovery. Because of stigma and the social repercussions of previous abuse and trauma, survivors of sex trafficking probable experience re-victimization, which increase liability to violence and different unfavorable health issues including human immunodeficiency virus infection (HIV) [42]. Less number of girls has received mental health care, and several survivors pleaded for more access to mental health services [42]. After the rescue, survivors need physical and psychological care [25]. They also need programs that assist in equipping them to earn a living before reintegrating them into society.

Survivors have varied needs that have to be met, such as social support, job skills, counseling, education, and life skills [32]. Social support serves to transition survivors into normal life by assisting them to overcome traumatic experiences and learn how to connect in the world outside of sex trafficking [32]. Job skills programs offer survivors an opportunity to identify their personal goals and to have a direction regarding their future. Likewise, education is essential because, usually, survivors have not completed their education, especially those who were sex-trafficked as minors [32]. Life skills training give survivors exposure to life experience since they were confined during trafficking experience and were unable to have entertainment or hobbies [32].

### Findings from existing literature

The literature analyzed helped to give an understanding and insight into this paper. All the inquiry questions were answered.

### Inquiry 1

#### Why is sex trafficking flourishing in India?

It was found through the existing literature that migration of large numbers of men into growing cities and rapid urbanization creates a demand for commercial sex in India. Also, gender imbalance due to sex-selective abortion practices. The caste system worsens the problem because those who are trafficked into the sex trade come from underprivileged parts of Indian society [15,16].

Matusek [19] stated that gender inequality, cultural norms, and socioeconomic factors enable sex trafficking to flourish in India. Poverty is considered a factor that keeps the trafficking of women going in the country. However, it is not the only factor that works against women in India, but because it is a male-dominated society [14].

### Inquiry 2

#### How is life for trafficked women?

In Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, small girls as young as nine years old are repeatedly raped by eight or more men every night [1]. The victims have no power of decision, and their bodies were commodities to satisfy clients. If they refused to stay with clients, brothel owners, or pimps would perform different kinds of violence on them [43].

Although life in the sex industry is terrible, they have no hope to come out of that situation because they are locked up during the day and forced to stay with clients at night [43]. They are always kept under guard, making it impossible to escape. If a woman tries to escape and taken back, she will face the consequences where the criminals would employ different forms of torture on her [43].

Trafficked women are vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse [24]. It was found that "being a victim of sex trafficking was associated with being voiceless, vulnerable, broken, hopeless, powerless, unworthy, controlled and scared" [28]. Also, there is a high prevalence of HIV among sex-trafficked females [16,29].

### Inquiry 3

#### What happens after the rescued?

Simkhada [22] said that many girls, after the rescue, spend time in a rehabilitation center, which provides social assistance and health care to trafficked girls. Nevertheless, in returning to their communities, they face high-level of social humiliation aimed at sex-trafficked girls. Often, not only the community but also the family members condemn their moral and reject them [22].

Da Silva and Sathiyaseelan [43] stated that the suffering, humiliation, and dejection of sex - trafficked women do not end after the rescue. Often they feel alienated and yearn for understanding, emotional support, acceptance, and respect [43].

### Conclusion

Brysk and Maskey [21] reported that hardly any international attention is given to sex trafficking in India, even though India corresponds to one - sixth of the population of the world. While sex trafficking is somewhat invisible, women in sexual slavery are living in an inhuman condition being subject to repeated rape in a single day (Jones, 2014).

Nearly all women and girls who have been trafficked into sexual slavery have psychological illnesses. Considering the immensity of the trauma they have endured, so little is understood about the misery these women undergo and how to help them. Recovery is possible if survivors get appropriate care and the opportunity to live a new life with dignity.

Girls and women are sexually exploited because there is no safety for females in the country. "Girls and women want safety. It is not their mistake. They were sold out to do all this. So, all society, government, and police should understand these whole things" (Personal communication, July 03, 2018).

When rescued, survivors need help to gain timely access to shelter, which brings security, economic assistance that makes the environment less threatening, job counseling and skills training enhance the self - esteem, and counseling enhances their overall well - being enabling them to establish a life free of violence and sexual exploitation. Moreover, prevention attempts should be made in order to improve security and economic opportunities for destitute women and girls, as well as educating society concerning the identities and tactics of traffickers to reduce trafficking.

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