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# Perspectives

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## A Global Crime Against Women: Sex Trafficking and Its Consequences

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## A Global Crime Against Women: Sex Trafficking and Its Consequences

**Breezy Ferreira**

Sex trafficking, a form of gender-based violence in which a specific gender is the target of violence due to the imbalance of power, is a common present-day global crime (Murturi 2006:83). Women are most often victims of this specific crime, (Muturi 2006:83) and it leaves many workers and victims with health implications such as obtaining HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (Macias Konstantopoulos et al. 2013:1194). This paper will begin by giving a brief overview of the definition of sex trafficking, before discussing a specific country's challenge with the problem. I will then analyze the scope of this issue based on the literature, and who the victims are, and finally the consequences trafficking has on its victims. The research problem in this paper is: why does sex trafficking occur and what are its implications?

Sex trafficking occurs in many regions of the world today. Under the international law of the United Nations (UN) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, sex trafficking is defined as, “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, of fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability” (Macias Konstantopoulos et al. 2013:1195). Around the world, women and girls consist of 98% of victims of sexual exploitation, most being children that are vulnerable, which leaves an impact on their development (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:124). It is estimated that around 700,000 and four million people each year are victims of trafficking (Simkhada 2008:235). The region that is most vulnerable for trafficking is argued to be all of Asia due to, “its huge population, growing urbanization, lack of sustainable livelihoods and poverty”

(Simkhada 2008:235). Many people who live in Asia were once able to be sustained by living off the land, however, it has become increasingly harder to do so, leading them into a life of poverty.

#### CASE STUDY: SEX TRAFFICKING IN NEPAL

One country that has had particular activism around the trafficking of women was Nepal. Anti-trafficking organizations in Nepal focus on the vulnerability that young Nepali girls have to urban wealthy men (Worthen 2011:94). Trafficking in Nepal is thought to be, “sending young girls from the hills to Kathmandu to serve as domestic workers and concubines for the ruling Rana family from 1800 to 1950” (Worthen 2011:94). After the Ranas lost their power, they went to India and took the girls with them, forcing many to engage in the same type of work in their new homeland. It was here in India that many of the girls engaged in prostitution by creating their own brothels and drafting Nepali girls to work in their brothels, due to the demand of the male population that mobilizes this problem, therefore many organizations believe that women are in need of protection (Worthen 2011:94). As more became known about sex trafficking in the areas of Nepal and India, organizations began to change their lists of the vulnerable, once they realized women of all regions were involved (Worthen 2011:95). The anti-trafficking agencies in this area report that today the most vulnerable victims to trafficking are those who live in a family with domestic abuse, are poor, and are uneducated, making them easier targets for traffickers (Worthen 2011:95).

Nepal primarily relies on their agriculture for their primary means of living, however, this is no longer enough to get by, due to the economic turmoil and depression that has led to a labor migration from rural areas to urban areas for both men and women to find better paying jobs (Hennink and Simkhada 2004:308). For females, it is common for them to be trafficked for

labor first and sex trafficked after (Hennink and Simkhada 2004:309). Nepal has been known as a country to traffic young women and girls and is, “viewed as one of the ‘sending’ countries in the Asian network of trafficking, and India and Pakistan are typical ‘transit’ or ‘destination’ countries for all trafficking” (Hennink and Simkhada 2004:309). Nepalese girls are commonly promised false jobs, first being sold to workers in factories, then being selected by the brokers that promise them a better job in another area, and finally will arrange for their transit to India (Simkhada 2008:238). Another tactic of traffickers is to use the false promise of marriage to these girls (Simkhada 2008:239), who easily fall for these tactics, as they are already in a vulnerable position.

One girl who fell for this was Radha (Simkhada 2008:239). Her husband had abandoned her and her young son, so when the promise of a rich husband was introduced, she gave in and eventually ended up in a brothel after a dinner date with the man one night (Simkhada 2008:239). This is a common tactic, for recruiters may also seduce the girl and pretend they have interest in being their boyfriend, gaining the trust of the young girls until they can convince them to visit a relative in a different town, gaining their trust and then forcing them into the industry (Simkhada 2008:240). The least common tactic of recruiters is abduction, drugging girls before they sell them to a brothel owner in India (Simkhada 2008:240). Abduction does occur, however, not as frequently as the false promise of marriage and the false promise of jobs do.

The false promise of a job is also seen in Bangladesh, girls and women are forced into sex trafficking while trying to find a better paying career. Bimal Kanti Paul describes how Rahima, a victim, met an agent named Kahled that promised her a job in the Middle East, but set her up and eventually, compelled her to be a prostitute (2000:273). Paul also explains how many

of the girls are young, between ages twelve and twenty-five, and go to the Middle East under false pretenses of being a maid (2000:270). Many of the young women and girls are desperate, and in hope of finding a job to help support their families, which makes them more vulnerable to being duped (Paul 2000). It is most common, in both Nepal and Bangladesh, that the girls are lured into trafficking through the false promise of a fiscal opportunity, as many of them come from poor rural families (Simkhada 2008:244). Poverty is a major cause of this issue, as it prompts women and girls, “already in a marginal situation in the social structure, into a vulnerable position in a saturated and segmented labor market” (Paul 2000:275). Women are already marginalized, and when placed into poverty, it makes them even more susceptible than they once were.

In India, many Nepali girls are placed into brothels in the area known as the red-light district (Simkhada 2008:241). The brothel typically contains anywhere from 5-10 to 150-200 women and girls and varies by price, size, and race of sex workers, it is here where the women and girls were exposed to both physical and psychological abuse (Simkhada 2008:241). Some of the psychological abuse includes, “intimidation, threats to self or others, deception, blackmail, isolation, and forced economic dependency” (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:135). The manager of the brothel forced the girls to work by reminding them of their debt (Simkhada 2008:242), and on rare occasions, the owner of the brothel made sex workers complete housework or other chores (Simkhada 2008:243). Managers of the brothels will occasionally take advantage of their position, making the girls do their dirty work that they do not want to do.

#### SCOPE OF SEX TRAFFICKING, VICTIMS, AND TRAFFICKERS

It is difficult to estimate the number of sex trafficking victims (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:127). This is due to the lack of a system to gather information on victims along

with, “(1) victims often do not have access to legal or social services; (2) victims fear retribution from their traffickers; (3) victims are fearful or distrustful of law enforcement; and (4) victims may not self-identify as being trafficked,” (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:127). These factors make it extremely difficult for the victims to seek help, along with the fact that they fear they will be treated as a criminal for what they have participated in (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:127). The primary victims include women and girls, making up 98% of victims of sexual exploitation (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:124). There have been many researchers that have tried to assess how many children are involved in commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and child sex trafficking in the United States of America with estimates from 1,400 to 326,000 (Miller-Perinn and Wuertele 2017:128). As stated above, it is difficult to estimate how many children are involved as they do not want to be seen as a criminal, or have their traffickers seek revenge on them.

There are a number of individual characteristics that predispose a person to sex trafficking (Miller-Perinn and Wuertele 2017:131). Many victims of trafficking, “often report drug and alcohol abuse, disability status, a variety of mental, physical, or intellectual difficulties” (Miller-Perinn and Wuertele 2017:131). There are also many different factors that include family function such as one’s parents having a substance abuse problem, a history of being involved in the child welfare system, and knowing family or friends that have been involved in prostitution or trafficking (Miller-Perinn and Wuertele 2017:131). The characteristics of a victim’s family are closely related to the risky behaviors of using drugs and alcohol, running away from their home, and dropping out of school which all may put them in a vulnerable position, making them more apt to be sexually exploited (Miller-Perinn and Wuertele 2017:132). Macias Konstantopoulos et al. (2013) found that these factors along with child sexual abuse and

low self-esteem all were central factors determining a person's nonconsensual involvement in sex trafficking. A few other determinants included not being educated in a formal institution, being economically challenged, and lack of opportunities to advance personal growth (Macias Konstantopoulos et al. 2013:1198). The study conducted by Macias Konstantopoulos et al. (2013) allowed respondents to state that the unhealthy experiences and relationships throughout childhood have many consequences including low self-esteem, the need for love, and improper sexual boundaries. It was also found that societal and cultural norms were promoters of this problem in certain areas because it was normal to sexually exploit women and girls (Macias Konstantopoulos et al. 2013:1199). The traffickers that were in search of victims preyed on their vulnerabilities, making it easier to coerce them into being trafficked.

The system of sex trafficking involves many different people. According to Staiger (2005:615), it is the recruiters, transporters, and people economically benefiting from the exploitation of a child that run the show. The recruiters were mainly female, and were former victims of trafficking themselves, who helped to gain trust of the vulnerable girl being coerced into the trafficking business, or males who pretended to be interested in girls (Staiger 2005:615). The motives of the traffickers are typically purely for profit and the motivation of child exploiters is only for sexual satisfaction (Staiger 2005:615). Both the traffickers and exploiters do not have the best interest of the child in mind, but what it is that they will be acquiring instead.

According to recent research, American youth are extremely vulnerable to becoming victims of sex trafficking (Kotrla 2010:181). After this was discovered people in the field refers to this as 'domestic minor sex trafficking,' or DMST (Kotrla 2010:181). Supply and demand functions as a reason to why not only DMST exists, but sex trafficking in general (Kotrla



2010:182). This supply and demand model can be looked at from either the traffickers point of view, who is driven by money, or from the perspective of the consumer, who is driven by sexual desire (Kotrla 2010:182). Kotrla (2010:182) suggests that the traffickers are persuaded by the profits in the sex trafficking industry which is approximately between \$32 billion and \$91 billion. Not only does the supply and demand model act as a reason to why this problem is alive and well in America, but in the world as a whole, as if there was no demand for this, the problem would not exist.

## CONSEQUENCES

There are many different consequences for the victims of sex trafficking. These can include physical health consequences, mental health consequences, and societal consequences (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:136). Many of the victims exhibit many physical health problems such as injuries including broken bones, weight loss, and sexually transmitted infections to name a few (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:136). Through this problem, HIV has significantly increased along with other sexually transmitted diseases, with studies suggesting that around 50% of victims of sex trafficking pursue medical care during the time they were being trafficked (Macias Konstantopoulos et al. 2013:1195). Macias Konstantopoulos et al. (2013) conducted a study in which the respondents described many, “health problems either associated with sex trafficking or consequential to the poor working and living conditions of sex-trafficked victims.” Not only was it the sexual encounters that produced health problems, but the living conditions of the victims as well.

In Tijuana, Mexico, an HIV epidemic has begun to emerge due to sexual exploitation. With this HIV epidemic, “the women and youth in sex work are among the most affected populations; HIV prevalence has increased from <1% to 6% among female sex workers in

Mexico-U.S. border cities in the past decade, and is >12% among those who also inject drugs” (Goldenberg et al. 2013:2). One of the reasons as to why Tijuana has such a high HIV rate is due to being homeless or being a recent migrant to Tijuana (Goldenberg et al. 2013:3). Another reason is that fact that many of the women had a drug abuse problem, aiding them to stay in the sex work business (Goldenberg et al. 2013:6). By turning to drug abuse, the women who injected these drugs were at an even higher risk for contracting HIV than performing sex work by itself.

Regarding mental health consequences, children are at an increased risk for many problems, “including educational deprivation, physical health problems, emotional problems (e.g. depression, hopelessness, guilt, shame, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem), and problematic behaviors (e.g. poor attachment and relating to others, antisocial behaviors, and alcohol and drug use)” (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:137). Not only are there mental and physical health consequences, but societal ones as well, including authorities treating the victims unfairly, as they might not view them as victims, but instead a criminal along with victims being ostracized from their family members when they get home (Miller-Perrin and Wuertele 2017:137). Many victims fear their return home, as they do not want to seem as a stranger to their own family.

Victims of sex trafficking experience physical and psychological abuse (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). It has been found that around 95% of women had been forced into a sex act or assaulted and around 63% were raped before they were sold (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). Psychological impacts on the victim include depression, addiction, PTSD, and suicidal symptoms to name just a few (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). Many of the females involved in this problem are controlled by being drugged, leading many of them to be addicted (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). This drugging is associated to the increase of HIV prevalence among victims

of trafficking as well, with the risk of HIV being high among victims of all ages, but was especially high in women who had been sold at age 14 or younger compared to those sold at 18 or older (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). Psychological violence that victims face is being isolated and realizing that this is actually happening to them, making them feel as though they have no control over their life (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). Many women and children involved in trafficking do not want to admit that they are being trafficked (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). Health care providers suggest that victims of trafficking, “would need long-term treatment from an interdisciplinary team of health professionals working together to address the multitude of health problems including treatment of physical and psychiatric trauma, sexually transmitted infections, and gynecological problems,” (Finkel and Finkel 2014:19). This goes to show just how traumatic it is to be involved in sex trafficking.

Gender-based violence outside the implicit violence in sex trafficking is another consequence. Because this issue is primarily violence against women, the definition entails, “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty whether occurring in public or private life” (Muturi 2006:89). This violence against women has many negative health implications including depression, pregnancy complications, and anxiety to name a few (Murturi 2006:89). Along with this, sexual violence has been linked to many health risks, psychological problems, and even death (Murturi 2006:89). There are studies that suggest girls’ first sexual experience is normally forced, and they are more likely to contract HIV than men, due to the fact that they are more likely to encounter forced sexual acts along with their physiology placing them at a greater risk of contracting HIV

(Murturi 2006:90). Women are not only more apt to be a target of sex trafficking, but are also at a higher risk than men are for contracting HIV during unprotected intercourse.

Sex trafficking is extremely prevalent in the world to this day. There are many different aspects of this type of trafficking, involving a number of, “players” (Staiger 2005:615) involved in order to not only obtain the girls, but transport them as well (Staiger 2005:615). There are a few specific regions that this problem is very common, such as in Nepal and Bangladesh. It seems that the major reasons sex trafficking occurs in the first place is due to poverty along with supply and demand for the women and girls. The second reason as to why this issue is extremely common is because of the supply and demand market, if there were no demand for the women and girls, this problem would not be occurring at this point and time (Kotrla 2010:182). Not only are the consumers swayed because of their desires, but the traffickers are persuaded by the \$32-\$91 billion-dollar market (Kotrla 2010:182). The only way that trafficking would not occur is if there was no poverty, no greed, and no demand for the women and girls.

Sex trafficking primarily occurs due to supply and demand along with poverty and has many implications for the women and girls that are involved, or were once involved. Being a woman or a young girl can have many negative health affects after this kind of gender-based violence, such as increased risk for HIV along with physical, mental and societal consequences. Women and girls who live in a poverty-stricken area serve to be more vulnerable, making it easier to be coerced into the industry. Supply and demand is a major reason as to why this issue occurs, if there was no demand for the women, there would be no reason for its existence.

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