

Trafficking of Women and Children in Bangladesh and Scotland

Salma Akter, Researcher, CFSR
Shamaila Tasneem, Save the Children

Introduction

Trafficking in women and children is considered as a contemporary form of slavery. It is a gross violation of women's and children's basic human rights by the international community. Trafficking is also a growing phenomenon internationally, regionally and nationally. Trafficking does assume specific regional and national dimensions because it is a global problem and an integral part of the process of international migration. The increasingly protectionist policies of countries of destination which also constitute the labour receiving countries and the subsequent restriction on legal forms of migration, as well as the growing economic crisis with increasing unemployment, play a major role in the growing incidence of trafficking of women and children within the Asia-Pacific and specifically within the South Asian region.¹

The increasing foregrounding of women and minors in the process of contemporary migration especially over the past decade is a consequence of two related phenomena, namely, the feminisation of poverty and the feminisation of migration². With a low average per capita income of 225 U.S. dollars and a massive labour surplus, Bangladesh is one of the largest migrant-exporting countries in Asia³. Migration to the West and migrant for work in the Middle East and South-east Asia are crucial poverty alleviation strategies for Bangladesh, as the value of migrants' remittances is 30 percent or more of

¹ J. SANGHERA, TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SOUTH ASIA: TAKING STOCK AND MOVING AHEAD, A BROAD ASSESSMENT OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING INITIATIVES IN NEPAL, BANGLADESH AND INDIA, UNICEF REGIONAL OFFICE SAVE THE CHILDREN ALLIANCE, November 21, 1999

² Ibid

³ A. Dasgupta, BANGLADESH: Dreams - and Hunger - Drive Trafficking into India, *Inter Press Service* - December 9, 2003

the country's national savings. There is also considerable irregular migration into adjacent India, mostly illegal, and undertaken with the help of middlemen in collusion with law enforcement agencies on both sides. The most extreme form of this irregular migration is trafficking, particularly in women and children with dreams in their eyes and hunger in their stomachs. Many would have not been eating more than one meal a day back at the home village⁴.

Hunger is a significant factor that creates an environment for criminals to prey upon young women and children. “Unless the fight against rural hunger takes priority now, trafficking of women and children will continue to rise,” according to one vocal anti-trafficking advocate⁵. Ironically, the fear of AIDS has contributed to extending trafficking, because the demand for virgins has increased exponentially.⁶ The collapse of the garment industries after September 2001 is noted for causing the increase in trafficking of women and children.⁷

Recent trends in globalization have atomized the structure of the family and the traditional rural household, and released each member as a separate and independent unit of labour to be plugged into the modern labour market. On account of the traditional sexual division of labour on the one hand and the demand for as well a subsequent growth of reproductive services in the globalised market on the other, women and girls are increasingly being pulled as service providers to fulfil the demand for a vast array of personalized, reproductive services in the entertainment and sex industry, domestic work, and the marriage market. In addition, the structural vulnerability of women on account of their exclusion from the public world, gender discrimination and undervaluation in the

⁴Ibid

⁵ R. Yesmin, “Rehabilitating Trafficked Women,” *Independent Bangladesh*, 7 September 2001

⁶ U. D. Banerjee, GLOBALISATION, CRISIS IN LIVELIHOODS, MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS: THE CRISIS IN INDIA, NEPAL AND BANGLADESH, in <http://www.qweb.kvinnoforum.se/misc/trafupala.rtf>

⁷ Jamila Ahmed Chowdhury, *Human Trafficking - A New Form of Slave Trade in Bangladesh, 2004* HURIGHTS OSAKA

economic sphere renders them as the ideal workforce alongside children to be exploited in low-paying work ghettos for maximum profit by the owners.

As such then, the demand for female labour to meet the rising demand for reproductive services in the newly configuring market economy as well as the rapid growth of many unregulated work ghettos in the informal sector of the economy which prey upon the vulnerable and exploitable labour of women and children to maximize profit in order to compete in the international market economy has foregrounded women and youth as key players in the process of in-country and cross border migration. These factors of demand coupled with a host of factors on the side of supply such as, disintegration of the traditional rural economy, skewed land reforms, shrinking employment opportunities, and intensified marginalisation of certain social and cultural groups has resulted in women and youth assuming key roles as income earners. Against this pressing need to migrate to sites of gainful employment since jobs have practically dried up in their home base, women and children fall prey to the designs of unscrupulous agents. And with legal channels of migration becoming more restrictive as well as costly for the marginalised poor, especially women, the services of agents and brokers who promise assistance with travel particularly across borders, as well as 'good jobs' become necessary. It is against this background that needy women and children become victims of trafficking and profit mongering.

Within the South Asian region this trend has resulted in certain countries being designated as 'sending' countries or sites of origin, while others assume the role of 'receiving' countries or sites of destination. A country such as India is not only a site of destination within the region, but a transit country as well wherefrom women and children are siphoned off to sites within the region as well as to other parts of the world. In this specialized regional division within the context of human trade and trafficking, Bangladesh and Nepal may be characterized as 'sending' countries or countries of origin whereas Pakistan is both a country of destination as well as transit. It has been observed over the recent years that trafficking of South Asian women and children is occurring not

only within and across countries of the region but to other regions and continents as well. Due to the underground and clandestine nature of this trade it is difficult to procure reliable statistics on the number of women and children affected by trafficking, but in the course of this study it became apparent through discussions with relevant players that the magnitude of trafficking within and from the region was expanding.

200 years ago slavery was abolished and the greatest shame of that time was brought to an end. Today we have a new shame, a new slavery, that of the human sex trade within which women and children are bought and sold like commodities. One of the clearest guides on how the international community should tackle this pernicious trade is the European Convention on Trafficking. Amnesty international calls upon the UK government to sign and ratify this treaty and use it as a baseline of standard.

Recent Growth in Trafficking in South East Asia

According to a recent survey conducted by the Human Rights Association (HRA), an NGO, human trafficking over the past decade has reached an alarming proportion. In Bangladesh it is very high. Twenty thousand women and children are trafficked every year. A powerful syndicate comprising reportedly a dozen top ranking recruiting agencies is involved in human trafficking. The institutions collect women and children alluring them with good jobs in most cases in the Middle East through their district and upazila agents throughout Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country of origin and transit for women and children trafficked to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the countries in the Middle East. Human trafficking has spread slavery to every continent and most countries of the world. Its high profit, low penalty nature makes it attractive to dishonest recruiting agencies. Poverty lies at the root of this problem. Specific law also needs to be developed and implemented. In many countries including the UK, there are no laws which prohibit trafficking rather, the victims are treated as illegal immigrants and imprisoned or deported⁸

⁸ The New Nation, Editorial page, May 3, 2005

In summing up some of the principal contributing causes to the recent increase in trafficking of women and girls some key factors can be identified. While elements of some these factors existed previously as well, this study has revealed that there is a marked intensification in the above trends contributing thus to the growing magnitude of trafficking in and from the region.

a) Gender perspective on Trafficking and Feminization of Poverty

Official documents bear out that women and girls, in particular those from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, are disproportionately represented among the victims of trafficking, but acknowledge that the problem of trafficking also includes the victimizing of young boys. (UN General Assembly Resolution 52/98)

‘While trafficking is a human rights issue, it is also a socio-political and economic issue, and cannot be separated from issues of nationality, gender and class inequalities.’⁹

“Worldwide, poverty is increasingly and disproportionately affecting women. Of the 1.3 billion absolute poor in the world today, 70% are women and their minor dependents.”¹⁰ This poverty is due, in part, to women’s lack of access to formal education and job opportunities in their countries of origin. Further, women fail to fully benefit from market ‘reforms’ of today’s world economic regime due to the lack of economic power in their communities and families.¹¹ At the same time, women are the principal segment of the population affected by the massive cuts in social spending by governments following

⁹ Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (1999). Trafficking of women. Los Angeles, USA

¹⁰ <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a115.pdf>

¹¹ UNIFEM (2002). Gender and Macroeconomics.

structural adjustment or similar reforms.¹² Due to gender inequities and relative powerlessness, ‘people who have little to lose may be willing to take great risks’.¹³

There is also an increasing trend among women to migrate from villages to cities within their own countries. Jenna Shearer Demir in her paper “Trafficking of Women for Sexual Exploitation: A Gender-Based Well-Founded Fear?”¹⁴ observes that while this most often occurred in the past as women accompanied their partners, women are progressively migrating for economic reasons and finding that formal sector jobs are even more closed to them than to their male counterparts due to their lack of schooling or other discrimination. Therefore, patterns show that the informal sector is largely receiving female internal migrants, and women are taking jobs with a lack of job security or benefits. Female-headed households are also on the increase in the majority world of developing countries, and these households tend to be poorer and support more dependents than male-headed households. This is resulting in what is being called the ‘feminization of poverty’.¹⁵

‘Because members of female-headed households are generally restricted to low-productivity informal-sector employment and experience higher dependency burdens, they are more likely to be poor and malnourished and less likely to obtain formal education, health care, or clean water and sanitation.’¹⁶

The internal uprooting, lack of a support network, and increased financial responsibility adds to the vulnerability of women to be recruited by a trafficker, in the hopes of improving her family or personal economic situation.¹⁷

¹² <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a115.pdf>

¹³ Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2001). *Trafficking of Women and Children in Asia and Europe*. Stockholm. p. 8.

¹⁴ *Infra* note 29

¹⁵ <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a115.pdf>

¹⁶ Todaro, M. (2000). *Economic Development*. Addison-Wesley, New York. p. 300.

¹⁷ <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a115.pdf>

B) Social and Cultural Attitudes:

In many cases social and cultural attitudes push vulnerable groups into trafficked situations. The most significant factors are those associated with gender inequalities. Women seldom have control over decisions regarding the key elements of their lives – investments in health, education, sharing in financial decision-making etc. Women are treated as if incapable and hence are a burden on the family, especially in communities where dowry payments are made by parents for girls upon marriage. These factors contribute to many people treating women and girls as expendable sources of income increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Stereotypes of behavior for young women tend to reinforce a sense of helplessness and of being unprotected without a man, vulnerability quickly recognized by opportunistic traffickers. Women and girls are also most likely to suffer from stigmatization once they return to their communities from such experiences, and have fewer options for alternative survival strategies. Hence the traffickers can increase their control over and isolation of women and girls through fear of further victimization.¹⁸ She revealed that besides trafficking of women to Gulf countries as sex-slaves, there is a trend of temporary marriage with Arab princes during the hunting season¹⁹

Where trafficked persons end up (demand side)

In Bangladesh, the various sectors into which adults are often trafficked - and hence demand trafficked labor - include: the commercial sex industry, domestic servitude, industrial work, hard and bonded labor, fishing and ship breaking industries and begging. Children are also trafficked into these sectors as well as camel jockeys. Until recently, most analysis of the human trafficking cycle has focused only on the supply side – the trafficked persons, their experiences, what are the impacts on them, and so forth. In

¹⁸ THE COUNTER TRAFFICKING FRAMEWORK REPORT: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, February 2004

¹⁹ *Ayesha Aftab, Labour Migration and Trafficking of Women: An Insight into the Socio-economic Implications, Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights, Pakistan*

contrast to this, only a handful of studies have tried to understand and address the question of “demand dynamics”, the other half of the trafficking cycle. In the context of human trafficking, *demand* refers to those people/organizations/syndicates that create or influence an environment that allows for exploitative working conditions to exist.

The amount of information available regarding these demand environments differs depending upon the sub-sector of exploitation. For example, there is much more information on the demand dynamics of the commercial sex industry than there is for domestic servitude and “sweat shop” situations, which appear to be inadequately researched. To fully respond to the trafficking problem, more understanding is needed to address *demand factors* in all sectors as a significant cause of trafficking.

Factors that influence the demand side of trafficking include the globalization of the labor market in sectors such as manufacturing as well as resource sectors such as fishing. There is strong downward pressure on the cost of labor in these sectors escalating tendencies to exploit labor and seek undocumented or trafficked workers. Hazardous work places also appear to use higher levels of trafficked labor (including commercial sex industry, ship breaking yards). To generate more discussion of demand dynamics,

- The break down of traditional social and economic structures and the atomization of household members into units of labour;
- Increasing insecurity of food and livelihood for a vast majority of the marginalised population in the region;
- The rapidly growing need to migrate for work ;
- Growth in the feminisation of migration due to women bearing greater economic burden of the household;
- Increasing segmentation and diversification of the market on account of globalisation and an expansion in the market demand for those services which require women’s and children’s labour;

- An increased demand for cheap, vulnerable and easily exploitable categories of labour such as that of women and children due to heightened competition and falling rate of profit in the global market;
- An increase in unregulated, invisible and underground sites of work in the informal sector of the economy, and hence increased difficulty in monitoring human rights violations, enforcing labour standards or targeting violence and abuse;
- Recognition of the tremendous increase in the margin of profits accruing from the trade in women and children;
- A growth in the activity of traffickers and the entry and consolidation of organised crime syndicates in the arena of trafficking of women and children;
- A general increase in the level of corruption among agencies responsible for enforcing law and order, as well as a growing nexus between organised crime and certain segments of law enforcement;
- Rampant rise in consumerism;
- Increased criminalisation and brutalisation of society and intensification of crimes against women and children such as rape, acid attacks and battery;
- Rapid growth in modern transport, technology and communications.

In regards to the purposes for which women and children in the region are trafficked, the following were identified by the study:

- prostitution/sex work
- forced marriage
- domestic work
- agricultural labour
- construction work
- carpet industry, garment industry as well as other sites of work in the formal and informal economy
- forced begging
- camel jockeying
- adoption trade
- organ harvesting

Most of these sites have already been identified by previous studies though it does appear that trafficking into forced begging, forced marriage and invisible work ghettos in the informal sector has escalated. The sex industry continues to dominate as far as trafficking of women and girls is concerned, and there appears to be a general consensus that increasingly younger girls are being plugged into the sex industry. However, it is to be noted that this ‘conclusion’ is not based on any rigorous research of the sex industry in South Asia but emerges primarily out of anecdotal evidence and tentative observation.

Changing Trends in Trafficking

Traffickers take advantage of Bangladesh’s sizable borders to transport the women, often using large criminal networks and deceptive tactics to avoid detection and prosecution. Bangladesh maintains that trafficking is carried out by well-organized regional gangs that have links with the various law enforcement agencies. Traffickers between India and Bangladesh often even marry their victims to protect themselves against prosecution under Pakistan’s stringent Islamic *Hudood* laws.(The protection project database)

Increased Vulnerability of Women and Girls

Traffickers take advantage of Bangladesh’s sizable borders to transport the women, often using large criminal networks and deceptive tactics to avoid detection and prosecution. Bangladesh maintains that trafficking is carried out by well-organized regional gangs that have links with the various law enforcement agencies. Traffickers between India and Bangladesh often even marry their victims to protect themselves against prosecution under Pakistan’s stringent Islamic *Hudood* laws²⁰.(The protection project database)



Trafficking of weaker vessels

²⁰ see website of hudood ordinance for definition

ASIF J. MIR

Women are being sold like animals in Pakistani markets. Trafficking in persons – the illegal and highly profitable recruitment, transport, or sale of human beings into all forms of forced labour and servitude, including trafficking into forced marriage – is a tragic and complex human rights abuse. Like it or not, the increasing trend lays bare the sort of future we are ill fatedly going to see. Bangladeshi women are being kidnapped, married off to agents by unsuspecting parents, trafficked under false pretenses, or enticed by prospects of a better life, into brothels in Pakistan. Border police and other law enforcement agencies are well aware of the trafficking through entry points into Pakistan like Lahore, Kasur, Bahawalpur, Chhor and Badin.

In cases of women trafficking, coercive tactics are used to control women. In many cases corrupt officials facilitate the trafficking, accepting bribes to falsify documents and provide protection. Without such corruption and complicity on the part of state officials, trafficking could not thrive. Pakistan treats trafficked persons as illegal aliens, criminals, or both, exposing them to further abuse. By targeting the victims instead of the perpetrators, it thus allows the abuses to continue.

The buyers of these unfortunate women fix their prices after examining and scanning their bodies. They humiliate and sexually harass them in public. A Bengali woman can be sold in Pakistan for Rs 70,000 to 150,000 - depending on age and looks. Auctions of girls are arranged for three kinds of buyers: rich visiting Arabs (sheiks, businessmen, visitors, state-financed medical and university students), the rich local gentry, and rural farmers. Hidden in the slums of Karachi, Pakistan is a flourishing trade in young women and girls from Bangladesh. The forced trafficking of Bangladeshi women into Pakistan for the purposes of domestic or sexual slavery has been going on for at least 10 to 15 years. The majority of is lured from with promises of jobs, decent pay and a better life. They often end up in brothels in Bangladeshi paras (slums) in Karachi, although as their numbers have grown, brothels have been found in

small towns throughout Pakistan.

In recent years, as the number of Bangladeshi women and girls trafficked into Pakistan has increased, the practice of selling female has become more clandestine. They are held under terrible conditions: they are not given proper food and are kept in crowded rooms. To compel the women and girls to provide the desired services, the pimps threaten to expose the women's status as illegal immigrants or denounce them under the Hudood laws, which penalise, among other things, sex outside of marriage and impose long prison terms and severe corporal punishment. Those who resist are beaten or worse. Instead of protecting the Bangladeshi women and girls by arresting those accountable for their illegal sale and forced prostitution or forced marriage, the Pakistani government imprisons the luckless women while allowing most brokers and pimps to go free.

Trafficking into Scotland

Organisations working in the field of prostitution, the Glasgow City Council Inter Agency Working Group, the results of the UK-wide Police initiative, Operation Pentameter and extensive newspaper reports have all shown trafficking to be a reality in Scotland but are likely to have revealed only the tip of the iceberg. Since January 2005 there have been about 140 suspected cases of trafficked women in Glasgow from over 26 nationalities.

The London Metropolitan Police have warned Glasgow that the Trafficking situation globally and in London could be mirrored in Scotland. The recent four month operation Pentameter has produced about 242 arrests and 144 charges and reported 94 people as victim of trafficking, including 18 children aged 14-17.

Conclusion

Trafficking of human kind depends mainly on the economy and administration of a country. Third world countries are unable to give the basic rights of the citizens, so trafficking is one of the biggest problem their. In the developed countries like UK, human beings are trafficking in to from different countries in alarming rate. So this is a problem for both developing and developed countries, which should be solved by political commitment.