

POVERTY AND SUSCEPTIBILITY OF SLUM CHILDREN TO THE EVIL OF TRAFFICKING IN INDIA***Ms. Manashi Neog******Asst. Professor, School of Public Policy and Law,******Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management*****ABSTRACT**

Child trafficking is a rampant evil prevalent in the world over. The magnitude of this evil is evident from the reported cases of trafficking and also on study of the data collected and compiled by civil society organisations on the child trafficking rate in different parts of the globe. The root causes of trafficking in children are multiple and complex, some of the more frequently cited being poverty, lack of employment opportunities, low social status of the girl child, general lack of education and awareness, inadequate legislation in the countries concerned, and weak law enforcement machinery. Political uprisings are now emerging as a factor responsible for trafficking for prostitution, labour and also as child soldiers to fight for the 'cause'. There are also cultural factors that are responsible.

Key words: **Trafficking, Slum, Poverty, Child**

DEFINING CHILD TRAFFICKING***Child Trafficking***

The trafficking of children is defined as the recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person under the age of 18 for the purpose of exploitation (including prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs) under United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children adopted in November 2000.¹ A child is a person under the age of 18 years. As per the two international covenants, Trafficking Protocol, 2000 and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, a child is taken to be trafficked if he/she has been moved within a country or across borders, whether by force or not for the purpose of exploiting the child.

ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATION BETWEEN POVERTY AND CHILD TRAFFICKING***Defining Poverty***

Poverty can be seen as manifestation of a state of deprivation of basic requirement for quality of life. This may include deprivation of food shelter, life drinking water, employment health education and clothing among others.

A person when deprived of those essential services and goods, is thus poor and poverty ridden. He may thus be at risk of engaging in available means of containment of life including human trafficking, child abuse, robbery, drug traffic and host of other social problems.²

Poverty is rife in India. India has one third of the world's poorest billion people (living on \$1.25 or less a day). But poverty has many aspects and according to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index which measures poverty in three dimensions- education, health and living standards- 55% of Indians, some 600 million people are considered to be in poverty. Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals, set

¹ Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, opened for signature 15 December 2000, 2237 UNTS 319, Annex II, Article 3

in 2000 to end world poverty by 2015, has been made although most goals are unlikely to be reached within that timescale.

Nexus between Poverty and Trafficking

It is an established fact now that trafficked persons are typically poor, have few job prospects, limited access to education and may come from rural areas, depending on the country of origin. (Omelaniuk 2005).³ Children, especially those from poor families, are most vulnerable to trafficking.

The General Assembly in the Preamble to the United Nations Global Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, recognizes that “poverty, unemployment, lack of socioeconomic opportunities, gender-based violence, discrimination and marginalization are some of the contributing factors that make persons vulnerable to trafficking.” (Assembly Resolution 64/293).⁴

Poverty and unemployment are considered to be among the factors of vulnerability linked to trafficking in persons. A commonly observed phenomenon in human trafficking pattern is that victims are often trafficked from relatively poorer to comparatively richer areas. Far fewer victims are trafficked in the opposite direction. All trafficking flows do not conform to this pattern, however, and economic differences alone cannot explain the whole trafficking phenomenon. Nonetheless, economic differences in combination with geographical proximity appear to explain many of the trafficking flows as identified and discussed in the report by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.⁵

The nexus between poverty and human trafficking is often bridged by child and forced marriages. Many a times, marrying off a daughter young can appeal to impoverished families for a number of reasons: it eliminates one hungry mouth, young girls aren't expected to have large dowries, so the younger she

²Dr. Musa Abdullahi, M.A. Deribe, Sani Mustapha Kura; An Assessment of the Relationship between Human Trafficking and Poverty in Nigeria, IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 19, Issue 10.

³ Irena Omelaniuk, 2005; “Trafficking in Human Beings”, United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development;

Available online: http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/ittmigdev2005/P15_IOMelaniuk.pdf

⁴ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 64/293. United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons; General Assembly Distr.: 12 August 2010; Sixty-fourth session.

gets married the less burden there is on the family and parents feel assured that their daughters will be provided for by marrying someone older.

The shocking and devastating reality is that many of these young marriages are just a pretext to obtain poor, uneducated girls who will then be sold and trafficked into slavery. Sometimes even if the marriage is honest on the part of the groom, the young bride will run away or in some other way enrage her husband so that he decides to rid himself of her by trading her in for cash.

Fighting poverty is about more than providing clean drinking water – it's about providing a future, providing options for a community. A family having enough to eat don't sell their children or marry them off when they're still underage. When girls are educated they can contribute more to their families than sex and babies, and they hold a higher value.

Unfortunately there will always be people in the world who are willing to take advantage of desperate circumstances, because by definition desperate circumstances leave few options. But by alleviating the most impoverished, the most illiterate, the most starved regions of the world we can minimize the number of opportunities for violence and imprisonment.

Trafficking of children (half of whom are between 11 and 14 years of age) and women is a plague of the poor. According to India's National Human Rights Commission, the vast majority of victims belong to socially deprived sections of society, as well as children from drought-prone areas and places affected by natural or human-made disasters.

The poor and conflict-torn states like Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam and Chhattisgarh are the source areas, where victims are transported from village home to city hell via a hectic hub such as Kolkata. Trafficked children are subjected to physical and sexual abuse and treated as slaves, with debt bondage being one of the many tools employed to trap children into perpetual servitude.

One of the key factors in child trafficking is socio-economic backwardness. Justice J B Koshy, former Chief Justice of the Patna High Court and Chairperson of the Kerala Human Rights Commission, told IPS, adding that a political-mafia nexus also fuelled the practice in remote parts of the country.

Koshy further stated, "Many families are unable to afford the basic necessities of life, which forces parents to sell their children". Some children are abandoned by families who can't take care of them. Some run away to escape abuse or unhappy homes. The gangsters and middlemen approach these vulnerable children. In some cases, good-looking girls are taken away by force."

An action research study conducted in 2005 by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) found that a majority of trafficking victims belonged to socially deprived sections of society.

Over the years, the Government has spent billions of Rupees and established agencies and units to enable it overcome the multiracial social problems of poverty human traffic, and child abuse. Nevertheless, despite governments' concern investment and the huge financial expenditure, the issue of poverty trafficking and other social problems in our poverty still remains a matter of serious concern to the general public.

SLUM CHILDREN MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO TRAFFICKING

Slum Population in India

Slum Population simply refers to people living in slum areas below the poverty line. As India is still on the path of development, there is large number of people living below the poverty line. These people usually live in slum areas connected to the city. According to Government sources, the Slum Population of India has exceeded the population of Britain. It has doubled in last two decades.

Over a period of time, increase in Indian population has also resulted in slum population growth. Despite Government efforts to build new houses and other basic infrastructure, most of the people living in slum areas do not have electricity, water supply and cooking gas.

Slums are the product of socio-economic and cultural conditions of a particular social system that inhibit the physical, mental, moral and social development of individuals. The conditions in the slums adversely affect the capacity of an individual thereby preventing him from developing and participating in the activities of the wider community life of the city⁶.

Slum Children and Trafficking

The slums are squalid and overcrowded urban streets or districts which are inhabited by very poor people.⁷ People in the slum areas, do not have enough facilities with which to live a fairly good life. Particularly rampant poverty among the slum dwellers is fuelling the growth in cases of trafficking in the country.

Children living in the slums suffer more when they have to succumb to the pressures of living without these required needs and this forces them to engage in allowing to be trafficked to a better destination. Due to large scale poverty among the people living in slums, many children fall prey to the traffickers who lure them with good food, shelter, clothes etc.

Children living in the slums are an extremely vulnerable group. These children are found on railway platforms, at bus stops, on pavements, at traffic lights and in religious places. The slum children are primarily working children who in order to make a living have no alternative but to beg, rag pick, shoe shine, and work as porters, work at food stalls and hotels, pick garbage and empty plastic water bottles from trains.

The abandoned and destitute street children have no ties whatsoever with their families. They are abandoned because of poverty, mental or physical handicap, and, in some cases, gender discrimination.⁸

CONCLUSION

The problem of child trafficking has become a serious human issue attracting worldwide attention. Trafficking of children violates the inherent right of a child to grow up in a protective environment and the right to be free from all forms of abuse and exploitation. It violates the universal human right to life, liberty and freedom from slavery in all its forms. Among children belonging to poor sections, we find this evil prevalent in a more rampant way.

Multiple and varied circumstances in the slums contribute to children being trafficked. Their major problem emanates from lack of knowledge of their human rights and for which they suffer various setbacks. This lack of knowledge therefore tends to accelerate the problems children in slums

⁶ R.N. Thakur & M.S. Dhadave., Slum & Social System, New Delhi, Archives Publishers, 1989, p.21

⁷ The Oxford Dictionary

⁸ Paul Hamlyn Foundations, Lost Childhoods, A study on platform children and other children in distress in India, Prepared by Udit Das, Submitted to Paul Hamlyn Foundation India Programme March 2013, pg.11

⁹ P.M.Nair; A Report on Trafficking in Women and Children in India 2002-2003; NHRC-UNIFEM-ISS PROJECT

encounter. Besides, problems more peculiar to people dwelling in slum areas, such as dysfunctional families, poverty, exploitation, domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect, alcoholism and drug abuse compel children to leave home and live on the streets⁹. They are thereby constantly exposed to the dangers of the city life and are vulnerable to exploitation, violence and various forms of abuse. In the absence of access to basic resources that are required for healthy growth and development, their right to education, proper nutrition, clothing, shelter and medical care are grossly violated.⁹

In spite of more than fifty years of legislation and interventions, the menace of child trafficking in India continues on a massive scale. Stark poverty has frustrated and offset all efforts to protect children. It is time to learn the lesson that treating the symptoms without addressing the causes will not make a significant impact upon the problem. We need to step back and start again by addressing the vulnerability of the victims. And lifting millions of people above the poverty line will indeed be a challenging task.¹⁰

¹⁰. Ibrahim Mohamed, Abdelfattah Abdelaziz; Wither Childhood? Child Trafficking in India, SocialDevelopment Issues 29 (3) 2007