

Health Impacts and Research Ethics in Female Trafficking

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ABSTRACT

Female trafficking is a social and public health problem, associated with physical and sexual abuse, psychological trauma, injuries from violence, sexually transmitted infections, adverse reproductive outcomes and substance misuse. It faces several challenges ranging from the hidden nature of the problem to ethical and human rights issues. The objectives of this paper are to analyze health impact of trafficking; ethical and research issues and anti-trafficking strategies in the Nepalese context. We collected published and unpublished data assessing the public health, ethical burden and research needs from different sources. Trafficked female involved in sex-industry that face grave situation as depicted and it might a reservoir of sexually transmitted diseases. Ethical issues related to survey of assessing the burden are difficult to carry out. The best ways to prevent and control these problems are to enhance anti- trafficking laws and raise awareness, empower and mobilize females and establish organizational capacity.

Keywords: empowerment, female trafficking, health issues, Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Female trafficking is a social and public health problem, associated with poverty, social exclusion, ignorance, slavery, bonded labor and socio-cultural factors. The prevalence of female trafficking is astounding¹ and an estimated 10,000-15,000 Nepali female are trafficked India annually for commercial sexual exploitation and more than 200,000 involved in the Indian sex trade.^{2,3} The 90% of female are trafficked to India and 10% in other countries.² Lower caste ethnic group from the hilly region of Nepal are at risk of trafficking.⁴ The objectives of this paper are: to analyze the health impacts of trafficking; ethical and research issues and anti-trafficking strategies.

HEALTH IMPACT OF FEMALE TRAFFICKING

Several broad categories of health consequences (i.e. physical, mental and emotional) are likely to be applicable to female trafficking.⁵ Most obvious are the direct health consequences of commercial sex, including increased

risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV, hepatitis B and sexual trauma. The long term complications of these threats include infertility, ectopic pregnancy and malignancies associated with STIs (e.g. cervical cancer and AIDS). The another category of health threats encompasses threats to mental health, such as depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and the complex psychological burdens of rape, slavery, and sexual exploitation. The third group includes difficulties relating to health care access, (e.g. preventive services), relevant to all the categories of health threats for which trafficked persons may have less access than non-trafficked sex workers.⁵ The HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are now prevalence across the urban and rural area of Nepal.⁶

INTERVENTIONS ON FEMALE TRAFFICKING IN NEPAL

Intervention programs on female trafficking in Nepal are implemented at *macro*, *meso* and *micro* levels.⁷

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This level of intervention engaging different actors in a sensitization program, which aims to impart mass awareness by arranging seminars, workshops, street drama, and house to house visits to inform people about trafficking. Allocation of budget for this program, national and international collaboration, supervision and monitoring of the anti-trafficking program at work place and in boarder area are also further interventions.

The meso level intervention is done in coordination with both micro and meso level authorities, through the regional and district level offices like, District and Regional Administrative Office, District and Regional Police Office, District Women Development Office, District Public Health Office, Regional Health Directorates, Municipality and Village Development Committee (VDC) and other related Organizations.

The micro level intervention focusing on forming or working with existing women's groups, recognizing that women are more likely to be able to act for change or resist trafficking collectively rather than individually. In addition, they aim to impart not just information but also to set up community systems and support through which empowered individuals or groups can be helped to take action and to obtain concrete assistance. Most community-based programs address trafficking in the context of a wide range of community needs and priorities and have found that taking a holistic approach is essential to gain community trust and support.

The main interventions in the holistic approach are prevention, care and support. Trafficking prevention interventions happen at target level (awareness raising, advice giving and social mobilization, referring female in trouble to other organizations; stakeholder collaboration with police, employing trafficking survivors and posting them at the borders to observe daily crossing and to intercept female in suspicious circumstances. The care and support for trafficked female is done for their rehabilitation.

The Government of Nepal, different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for instance Maiti Nepal, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal police and the civil society are involved in anti- trafficking campaigns. Nepalese NGOs have been instrumental in raising awareness of the scale of trafficking and supporting victims. They have organized rallies and worked with Indian NGOs and law enforcement agencies to rescue female trapped in brothels in India. The overall key interventions are: raising awareness of trafficking and mobilizing local groups to combat trafficking through workshops and training, Sensitizing government and other stakeholders about issues of trafficking and HIV/ AIDS from a human rights perspective, community

mobilization to strengthen local strategies for gender empowerment and community action against trafficking, development of training modules, information packages, Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials, lobbying, research on livelihood and coping strategies of returning female migrants and sex workers, operation of a transit home to facilitate the recovery and support of trafficked person, Alternative livelihood strategies: cross-border and within border advocacy and networking with NGOs and government agencies.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN CARRYING RESEARCH ON FEMALE TRAFFICKING

A number of ethical concerns arise like (a) Do no harm: Researchers need to be sensitive about interview (b) Prepare referral information: the interviewer should be ready to direct them to support services such as free health clinics, shelters and women's centers;(c)Protect the female privacy and confidentiality: do not reveal their names, photograph, and video (d) Obtain informed consent: female must fully understand the purpose of the interview and content, potential risk factors, and how the information that they provide will be used; and (e) Respect to female related ethical issue is that a number of the respondents and especially female intercepted in the process of trafficking would tell one story at first and would then tell another story in a repeat interview.^{4,8} Female engaged in prostitution in Nepalgunj, Nepal were reluctant to tell their names and their caste/ ethnic identities due to fear of police brutality if it became known that they were of higher castes.⁴ Apart from police brutality and the fear of exposure, there are many reasons why such female lie, and this has made it very difficult to build rapport with trafficked female within the short period designated for field research.

APPROACH TO RESEARCH ON FEMALE TRAFFICKING

Women empowerment approach: It might be relevant as a change theory for the research on female trafficking issue.⁹ Trafficking problem should be addressed, the context and main challenges at first. Trafficking of female issue is hidden and largely unreported.⁹ The complex process of females trafficking can be explained by looking into the defining features of hard and soft trafficking that is defined by means of recruitment and determined by movement, this distinction was developed by John Frederick.⁴ Victims of soft and hard trafficking may use the same routes, bribe the same authorities and eventually end up in similar exploitative working conditions, in brothels or in circuses. Hence, hard versus soft trafficking must be described with a model of coercion/complicity, i.e. who forces the female into

prostitution for their own benefit, family or nonfamily, and how and why.⁴

Re-solving of trafficking problem approach: Female need to organize together to develop the capacity to respond to violence and threats, identify the risk of trafficking and intervene directly to prevent victimization. Locally-based groups need to be networked together for protection, technical support and training. It will be more effective if there are local mother groups to define their own strategies for emerging out of slavery.

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