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Trafficking Women and Children in Bangladesh: A Silent Tsunami of Bangladesh

Md. Ruhul Amin (Corresponding Author)

Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University. Bangladesh.

E-mail: rubel_2008iu@yahoo.com

Md. Rashidul Islam Sheikh

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University. Bangladesh.

E-mail: mrisheikh@yahoo.com

Abstract

Trafficking in human beings is abhorrent phenomenon. Bangladesh is a source and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. The major purpose of this paper is to analyze the present state and process of trafficking, network relations among the traffickers and the causes of trafficking and its impact in a patriarchal social system like Bangladesh. The trafficking has become a major issue of concern and its intensity is growing day by day in Bangladesh. This paper also suggests some suggestions to prevent trafficking as well as to reintegrate the trafficked victims with the main stream of population.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Trafficking, Children, Women, Anti-trafficking, Act, Ordinance, GO, NGO.

1. Introduction:

The trafficking in women and children is a nationwide as well as worldwide issue. Trafficking in women and children is repugnant phenomenon. Trafficking in persons means the transportation of a person within a country or across borders through coercion, deception or illicit influence with the purpose of exploiting the victim. Women and children are trafficked within the country for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Women and Children are subjected to forced labor as factory workers, domestic servants, beggars, and agricultural workers. Human trafficking is a multi-dimensional issue. Trafficking clearly violates the fundamental rights to life with dignity. Victims may suffer physical and emotional abuse, rape, threats against self and family and even death.

Efforts have been made during the last decade by the UN, other international agencies, international and local NGOs and governments to highlight and address the issue by reaffirming policy commitments and strengthening legislation and law enforcement, as well as by supporting the victims. During the last few years a series of broad programs have been developed. Most countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby committing themselves to respect, protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of women and children.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the present situation, causes and process of trafficking, and its impact in Bangladesh, where women and children and forced them to engage in sex trade, domestic work, forced pleading, jockeying and organ harvesting in fake hope of employment etc.

2. Definition of Trafficking:

The Bangla equivalent of the word ‘trafficking’ is *pachar*. It has a mild connotation which means transfer from one place to another. If the term *pachar* is used in reference to women and children, in *Bangali* the phrase *nari o shishu pachar* means illegal transfer of women and children from one place to another. There was no internationally agreed definition of trafficking in persons until 2000. The United Nations Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, adopted in November 2000, defines trafficking as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

The countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) adopted a definition in their Convention for Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children. Nevertheless, consultation workshop, organized by the Resistance Network in Bangladesh in August 1999, made suggestions for changes in the convention. The following definitions were proposed in the workshop:

“Trafficking in women consists of all acts involved in the procurement, transportation, forced movement, and/or selling and buying of women within and/or across border by fraudulent means, deception, coercion, direct and/or indirect threats, abuse of authority, for the purpose of placing a woman against her will without her consent in exploitative and abusive situations such as forced prostitution, forced marriage, bonded and forced labor, begging, organ trade, etc.”

“Trafficking in children consists of all acts involved in the procurement, transportation, forced movement, and/or selling and buying of children within and/or across border by fraudulent means, deception, coercion, direct and/or indirect threats, abuse of authority, for the purpose of placing a child against her/his will without his/her consent in exploitative and abusive situations such as commercial sexual abuse, forced marriage, bonded and forced labor, begging, camel jockeying and other sports, organ trade, etc.”

In the context of Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Women’s Lawyer Association (BNWLA) defined trafficking as,

“ all acts involved in the recruitment and or transportation of a women or child within or across national borders for work or service by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, dept bondage, deception or other forms of coercion”.

3. Objective of the Study:

The overall objective of this study is to identify ways and means of trafficking. The general objectives of this article are given follows:

- To understand the trends and patterns of trafficking

- To identify the major problems, challenges and constraints of trafficking which have create problems in socio-economic development of Bangladesh.
- To analyze the roles and functions of the formal and voluntary agencies that was involved in containing and combating this phenomenon.
- To make appropriate recommendations for solving or at least alleviating the identified problems and challenges of trafficking.

4. Methodology:

This is basically a desk research. Most of the data has been collected from secondary sources. So this work has been based on published information and data available in any form such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers etc. Existing information was extracted from various sources to enable readers to understand the problems relating to trafficking from various perspectives. In this article, we have analyzed the data of last six years of trafficking in Bangladesh.

5. Women and Children Trafficking in Bangladesh: An Overview

Trafficking is indeed a growing problem in Bangladesh. It has been reported that there are about one million ‘undocumented’ Bangladesh women in Pakistan. A significant number of who are believed to have been trafficked. According to the UNIFEM, about 300,000 Bangladeshi children have been trafficked to brothels in India over a period of time. Over the last five years at least 13,220 children are reported as being trafficked out of the country and it was possible to rescue only 4,700 of them. It is believed that about 4,500 women and children from Bangladesh are trafficked to Pakistan annually. On the other hand, Bangladesh boys in the ages between 4-12 years are trafficked for camel racing in the Gulf; sexual exploitation of these boys by the employers is not uncommon.

Bangladeshi men and women migrate willingly to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Iraq, Lebanon, Malaysia, Liberia, and other countries for work, often under legal and contractual terms. Most Bangladeshis who seek overseas employment through legal channels rely on the 724 recruiting agencies belonging to the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). These agencies are legally permitted to charge workers up to \$1,235 and place workers in low-skilled jobs typically paying between \$100 and \$150 per month. According to NGOs, however, many workers are charged upwards of \$6,000 for these services. A recent Amnesty International report on Malaysia indicated Bangladeshis spend more than three times the amount of recruitment fees paid by other migrant workers recruited for work in Malaysia. NGOs report many Bangladeshi migrant laborers are victims of recruitment fraud, including exorbitant recruitment fees often accompanied by fraudulent representation of terms of employment.

In Bangladesh, various ways are practiced for the procurement of women and children for the purpose of trafficking. One of these practices is procuring young girls through marriage. For this purpose, men are being employed outside the country. They come back to their village homes to get married. After marriage, the young wife accompanies the husband to his place of work and since then, no trace could be found of these young girls.

The other way is that the traffickers entice young girls that they would provide them with jobs and better prospects in other countries. “What is alarming is that a large number of garment factories are now acting as

recruiting stations for the traffickers”. In other cases, sometimes, parents also sell their children to the traffickers on account of poverty and hunger. Kidnapping is another way that is being practices for the procurement of women and children for trafficking.

6. Causes of Trafficking in Women and Children in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh is one of the vulnerable countries for trafficking because of its large population and the large population living in conditions of chronic poverty, regular natural disaster and gender inequality. Most reports emphasize that, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and women being trafficked from Bangladesh into India and other countries. The causes of trafficking and the factors leading to this apparent increases in recent years are multiple and complicated.

However, for the present purpose, the factors have been categorized into two groups. The first group, the ‘push’ factors, includes the conditions which are responsible for trafficking of people from one country to another country. The second group refers to the set of ‘pull’ factors that support the demand for trafficked victims.

Causes	
Push Factors	Pull Factors
Lack of economic solvency	Effect of Free Market Economy
Lack of Awareness	Urbanization
Poverty	Better job opportunity
Gender Discrimination	Influential power of Media
Migration	Information and Communication Technology
Illiteracy	Economic Solvency
Dowry	
Natural Disaster	
Empowerment	

Moreover, existing patrilineal family system of Bangladesh are making women and children vulnerable to trafficking to a greater extent. Poor households, in particular, manage with this in various ways.

Besides, there are some other identified causes of trafficking in women and children that includes:

1. Poor, unmarried, divorced, separated, abandoned, widowed and sexually exploited women
2. Increased marital dissolution in terms of desertion, separation and divorce of the women,
3. Unemployment and rapid growing need of cheap labor in the international market
4. Natural disaster and displacement of people,
5. Inadequate government policies in favor of women
6. Lack of social security and safety
7. Inefficiency of the law-enforcing agency
8. Corruption amongst the members of law-enforcing agencies
9. Sexually abused children
10. Complications of restoring to law are both

7. Modes and Routes of Trafficking:

Traffickers adopt different strategies and tricks to allure and enroll young children and women into the trafficking process. In Bangladesh, traffickers hunt for their clients at the river ports, bus stations, and the railway stations across the country. At these locations, the traffickers look for migrants who come from the rural areas for jobs or for poor young people abandoned by their families and allure them with false promises of better life.

Twenty-eight of the 64 districts of Bangladesh have common borders with India, and two have borders with Myanmar. Monitoring and policing any unlawful activities are it trafficking of humans or smuggling is a gigantic task, and the traffickers take advantage of this situation. The most preferred route, used by them, is the land route followed by air and waterways. There are as many as 18 transit points along the India-Bangladesh border through which children and women are smuggled out of the country. The border areas of *Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, and Sylhet* are frequently used as land routes for trafficking. In the northern region, the districts of *Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Naogaon, Chapai Nawabganj and Rajshahi*, and in the south, *Jessore and Satkhira* are the areas where women and children are most susceptible to trafficking. The Northern region is the most vulnerable area for trafficking with a large number of upazilas and districts having common borders with India. The next most vulnerable area is the area south of the *Ganges-Padma* with 11 upazilas having a common border with *India* and its closeness to *Kolkata*.

7. Process and Pattern of Trafficking in Bangladesh:

Human trafficking is increasingly recognized as complex process and the factors that make an individual vulnerable to being trafficked are multifaceted. It involves a series of episodes for the trafficked person which might start with the desire or need to leave their home/ community or migrate, followed by an encounter with a trafficker leading to coercion or deception and to highly harmful and exploitative working situations. For others it might start with family members handing over responsibility for their safety and well being to others known to them and then end up trafficked by a third set of actors. Desperate circumstances often lead migrants to take difficult decisions and lead them into situations of great risk and vulnerability. Traffickers throughout South Asia lure their victims by means of attractive promises such as high paying jobs, glamorous employment options, prosperity and fraudulent marriages. It is estimated that 35% of the total number of girls and women trafficked to India have been abducted under the pretext of false marriage or good jobs. Poor households in debt or struggling with insecure livelihoods may be compelled to hand over a person or may agree to migrate legally or illegally or take a job willingly. But once that work or service is no longer voluntary, that person becomes a victim of forced labor or forced prostitution and should accordingly receive the protections contemplated by the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. Once a person's work is recruited or compelled by the use or threat of physical violence or the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process, the person's previous consent or effort to obtain employment with the trafficker becomes irrelevant. A person may agree to work for an employer initially but later decide to stop working because the conditions are not what they agreed to. If an employer then uses force, fraud, or coercion to retain the person's labor or services, the employer becomes a trafficking offender and the employee becomes a victim. The nationalities of trafficked people are as diverse as the world's cultures. Some leave developing countries, seeking to improve their lives through low-skilled jobs in more prosperous countries. Some families give children to adults, often relatives, who promise education and opportunity but instead sell the children into exploitative situations for money. But poverty alone does not explain this tragedy, which is driven by fraudulent recruiters, employers, and corrupt officials who seek to reap profits from others' desperation. Parents and family members are also deceived by false promises and deception. However studies confirm where victim's family members and relative collude with traffickers in order to receive payments (US TIP Report, 2009).

In several areas this is seen as a viable strategy for poor families, and therefore they do not support prosecution nor acknowledge the level of harm caused to victims or the community.

The network relations of traffickers of Bangladesh with traffickers of South Asian countries are very strong. The local agents collect the targeted women and girls from different places of Bangladesh and then hand-over them to the brokers who arrange the travel to the border belt area and hand over to their counter part of Indian brokers. The women and girls are escorted to their destination and delivered to the employer's agents of the prostitutes, agents to the tourism and many of them are sold to the international traffickers for Middle East, Pakistan and other places of the world.

8. Consequences of Trafficking:

Trafficking is a violation of human rights, and has various consequences at the individual, family, community and country levels. The trafficked women and children are forced and sold as sex workers, domestic workers, laborers and other type of exploitative works. The main consequence of trafficking is the violation of basic human rights of women and children. The specific consequences are stated below.

8.1. Health:

Victims of trafficking work under conditions which are hazardous to their mental and physical health. The trafficking of young women into prostitution has a formidable impact on HIV transmission. Studies have shown that brothel sex workers are most likely to become infected during the first six months of work. Another study reported that about 80% of the street child prostitutes were suffering from problems relating to reproductive organs, such as vaginal oozing, vaginal itching. Children and women trafficked for purposes other than commercial sex, for instance, domestic and industrial work may also have an increased risk of HIV infection because of their exposure to instances of forced sex and perhaps also the potential initiation into substance misuse, including contact with intravenous drug users. The provision of health care for these women and children is often sporadic at best. Serious illnesses often go untreated. Unwanted pregnancies and high-risk abortions are also common and may have lethal consequences.

8.2. Social effects:

Trafficking into the sex industry leads to stigmatization of the victims and their families. This makes it hard for the victims to return to their families, who may not welcome them. It may also be hard to get acceptance and support from the community at large. It may be even harder if the victim is believed to suffer from HIV.

8.3. Legal effects:

The legal consequences for trafficked persons vary depending on the legislation in the country of destination and the country of origin. In the vast majority of destination countries, trafficking is primarily seen in terms of illegal migration and prostitution. Since trafficked persons rarely have either travel documents or residence permits, the law enforcement authorities focus on the victims rather than the traffickers. Victims may be arrested and deported while the perpetrators go unpunished and continue to operate.

8.4. Communal effects:

The effects of trafficking in persons on society have not yet been sufficiently analyzed. However, there seem to be negative repercussions. Trafficking manifests and perpetuates patriarchal attitudes and behavior and undermines efforts to promote gender equality and eradicate the discrimination of women and children. Trafficking in persons is also closely intertwined with other criminal activities such as drug dealing, illegal gambling and money laundering.

The specific consequences are given below.

1. The young women are being victim of deception with the false hope of employment and marriage without dowry and ultimately many of them are involve in sex trade.
2. Many of the women and children are compelled to forced marriage, forced begging, camel jockeying due to coercion.
3. Women and children are subject of forced labor and slavery like practices.
4. Many children are being victim of debt bondage labor.
5. Probability of HIV/AIDS due to expansion of sex industry.
6. In many times trafficked victims are killed for organ harvesting.

9. Anti-Trafficking Laws of Government of Bangladesh:

The Bangladesh government has announced a number of laws and policies, which deal with to prevent trafficking in women and children:

9.1. *The Penal Code 1980, modified in 1991*, contains provisions of kidnapping, abduction, slavery and forces labor. The provisions ensure the penalty of the kidnapers, and no way of them to be free from the prime.

9.2. *The Cruelty to Women Ordinance in 1983*, this provision provides punishment for kidnapping and trafficking of women. Death penalty or life imprisonment with fine for the kidnapers or traffickers.

9.3. *Suppression of Violence against Women and Children, 2000 (Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Doman Ain 2000)*. This act states the punishment for trafficking of women with death penalty or life imprisonment with fine.

9.4. *The Women and Children Repression Act of 1995* (Special Provision) is a modification of the 1983 Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance. In the new act, crime related to children is tied to those related to women. This act specifies (Section 8) that trafficking a woman for prostitution or unlawful or immoral purposes or import or export or buying or selling or renting or engaging in any other form of transportation of women is a subject to life imprisonment and fine.

9.5. *The Suppression of Immoral Trafficking Act of 1993* provides stringent penalties for forcing a girl into prostitution.

9.6. *The Anti-Terrorism Ordinance of 1992* makes all the types of terrorism including the abduction of women and children a punishable offence.

9.7. The Children Act of 1974 and 1993 (Pledging of Labor), seek to protect children from exploitative and hazardous conditions.

10. Role of GO-NGOs for Combating Trafficking:

10.1. Role of GO:

The Bangladesh Government has also expressed grave concern about trafficking of women and children. To combat trafficking, the Government has enacted a number of laws. Noteworthy among these are The Children Act 1994 and the Oppression against Women and Children 1995 (Special Act). Besides, the Government has taken some concrete measures to combat trafficking such as, the establishment of a Anti-trafficking Cell within the Ministry of Home Affairs. Moreover, with reference to the 3rd Beijing Biennial Ministerial Meeting at Male, Maldives, the Bangladesh Government is also contemplating the possibility of facilitating the setting up of a cross-ministerial Anti-trafficking Cell to coordinate actions in different areas of anti-trafficking, i.e., prevention, prosecution, and protection.

10.2. Role of NGOs:

In Bangladesh, many NGOs and women's organizations, from the last decade, have initiated interventions to prevent and eliminate prostitution as well as provide rehabilitation and support services to sex-workers and their children. Such interventions include education, awareness development, research and documentation, action programs, advocacy and media participation for combating women and child trafficking. Various national NGOs like UBINIG, the Centre for Women and Children Studies (CWCS), Uttoron, besides many others, are playing an important role in addressing the issue of trafficking. Also there are regional networks like Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) playing an important role in addressing the issue through different collaborative efforts. While at the national level, many NGOs are doing a lot of rehabilitation and reintegration work but the extent of successful reintegration is limited. This is primarily true in the case of South Asia due to the community resistance to accept the trafficked women or girls once they are identified as being associated with the sex trade. The social and cultural morality based code of conduct for women is defined by patriarchal norms of the South Asian society. However, certain NGOs have been able to strategize and find an effective way for dealing with this problem. NGOs in Bangladesh are observed to be involved in the following types of activities to combat the menace of trafficking. These are awareness raising, research and documentation, action programs, advocacy and media participation, investigation, rescue and rehabilitation programs for trafficked women and children.

In Bangladesh, many international NGOs have incorporated women and children specific programs related specifically to addressing issues of trafficking in their activities. These are: Save the Children Alliance, The Asia Foundation, Plan International, Action Aid, etc. In addition, some major INGOs and donor organizations such as CIDA, DANIDA, SIDA, OXFAM, CEDPA, Population Council, US AID, Red Barnet, Trafficking Watch Bangladesh, etc. are involved in anti-trafficking programs.

In addition of the above women centered policies, the GOB has introduced National Action Plan in consultation with NGOs. This plan identifies priority areas in 14 ministries and divisions under initiative of The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. Besides, UN Task Force in Bangladesh, UNAIDS in Bangladesh, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM,

ILO–IPEC supports NGO program, International Organization of Migration (IOM), UNFPA and WHO are involved for combating the trafficking of women and children.

11. Recommendations:

- To have clear picture on various manifestations of trafficking research should be done on forced labor, child trafficking for begging, impact of trafficking on health of victims and societies they live in.
- To arrange gender sensitizing awareness programs for the people, addressing key aspects of gender discrimination.
- It is necessary to ensure that women are not marginalized in low paid labor market. Programs should be developed on vocational training and education for women to enter into modern labor market.
- Training programs should be developed for law enforcement officials, law and policy makers, teachers, medical and immigration personal on trafficking
- NGOs should play important role in developing and implementing these programs and should be supported both by Governments and International organizations.
- National Plan of Action has to be developed to coordinate anti trafficking efforts.

12. Conclusion:

Trafficking is today a major social and political concern both globally as well as nationally. It has also become the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. Bangladesh is a poverty stricken country, human trafficking is increasing at an alarming rate. However, concerted efforts are there on the part of the Government, the international agencies, the donor community and the NGOs to combat the problem. Trafficking in women and children is a violation of several human rights including the very right to life, the right to liberty and human dignity, and security of person, the right to freedom from torture or cruelty, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to a home and family, the right to education and proper employment, the right to health care and everything that makes for a life with dignity. Trafficking in women and children is on the rise. And yet, the re-addressed mechanisms are woefully inadequate and the way the various governmental agencies have dealt with this gross violation of human rights has left much to be desired.

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