

Reintegration of Sex Trafficking Survivors in Nepal: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract

The core intent of this study is to learn about the challenges faced by women survivors of sex trafficking in Nepal after their return. The study has attempted to answer questions about challenges survivors face, how they cope with the challenges, and resources available to these women to cope with the trauma and move ahead in life. In doing so, the study first considers demand and supply theory examining the influences of patriarchy, structural violence, the feminization of poverty and the social practices that support sex trafficking. The study also considers basic needs theory, increased opportunities to empower women, enhance participation and ensure their basic human rights. Despite all the hardships, survivors' determination to rise from the ashes demonstrates courage and resilience. Throughout the study, empowerment is recognised as the driving force for these women to survive and thrive post-return. Economic independence, family's love and acceptance, support and care from non-governmental organizations, and breaking silence regarding the ordeal these women survive foster empowerment. The study stresses the need to increase public awareness about sex trafficking in order to enable a respectful and dignified environment for the survivors. Survivors and NGO workers' insight and experiences emphasize that for plans and policies to work effectively, the government bodies should work hand in hand with non-governmental organizations and increase the involvement of survivors throughout the reintegration process.

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of Study and Research Questions.....	4
Organization of Thesis.....	5
2. CONTEXT.....	8
Historical Background.....	9
Present Context.....	11
Conclusion.....	14
3. LITERATURE	
REVIEW.....	16
Demand Theory.....	16
Supply Theory.....	18
Efforts toward Rescue and Reintegration.....	23
Legal Actions against Trafficking.....	25
Role of Non-Governmental Organizatins.....	26
Peacebuilding Theories Supporting the Research.....	27
4. METHODOLOGY.....	32
Participants.....	33
Data Analysis.....	37
5. CONCEPTUALIZING SEX TRAFFICKING THROUGH LIVED	
EXPERIENCES.....	39
Sex trafficking Causes and Processes.....	39
Life in a brothel.....	42
Story of Escape/Rescue.....	44
Life experience in Homeland after return.....	47
Reintegration Process.....	47
Return to Normal?.....	50
Coping Mechanisms.....	59
Conclusion.....	60
6. MOVING FORWARD TOWARDS A BETTER	
TOMORROW.....	63
Services from the Government.....	63
NGOs and Government Supporting Survivors.....	65
Survivors and service providers take on reintegration and what is needed in addition.....	68
Conclusion.....	72
7. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING	
REMARKS.....	74
Structural Violence and Unfulfilled Basic Human Needs.....	75

Survivors and Human Rights.....	77
Empowerment.....	78
Future Hopes.....	81
Conclusion.....	82
Final Words and Future Research.....	84
REFERENCES.....	86
APPENDIX A INDEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDES.....	94
APPENDIX B INTERVIEW WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS.....	95

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Trafficking of human beings appears to be a phenomenon as old as history, and is an atrocity known to every society. At national as well as international levels, human trafficking has been an immensely significant issue of discussion. The US State Department (2009) names human trafficking as the world's third largest organized crime after drugs and armed trafficking (As cited in Deane, 2010). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (2009), trafficking is a form of modern day slavery where humans are both prey as well as predators for the sole purpose of economic gain (p. 6). A report on trafficking published by the Embassy of the United States in Kathmandu, Nepal (2011) states that with the help of agents and brokers, thousands of Nepali migrants leave willingly to work in manual labor job positions in Gulf-countries, Malaysia, Israel, South-Korea, Afghanistan, and Libya. However, the broker company often takes away workers passports once people reach their destination. People are not paid as per their contract; a lack of proper food and accommodation, and sexual abuse are some of the conditions which keep people actually captive at their destinations as forced labor. Sexual exploitation (in seventy-nine percent of those trafficked) is the most common form of human trafficking followed by forced labor (in eighteen percent) in 155 different countries of the world (UNODC, 2009). This study focuses on the population trafficked for sexual exploitation, using Nepal as a case study.

The internationally-accepted definition of trafficking is found in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children which states human trafficking is,

... 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, of 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 service, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (United Nations, 2000).

This definition recognizes the multi-dimensional aspects of human trafficking validating its transnational nature of operation.

In this study, I have attempted to incorporate some of my own reflective connection with the issue of trafficking. I come from the small country of Nepal located in South Asia in between two power houses, India and China. Coming from a society highly characterised by strong patriarchal values, during the early years of my life, I considered myself privileged to be brought up in an urban community knowing without question or discussion that other women of similar age as me or even younger did not have the same privileges and could be deprived of her basic human needs. Gradually, with education and life experience I have become conscious of the fact that my silence inadvertently supports discrimination and oppression which I absolutely do not intend to pursue. Women in Nepal have been suffering from various forms of violence such as domestic violence (physical and mental partner abuse, polygamy etc.), social violence (witch allegations, discrimination based on caste etc.), rape, sexual violence, murder and trafficking (Banskota, 2013). The increasing rate of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in these regions has created an alarming situation throughout the Indian sub-continent. All these serious

human rights violations stood as a baseline for me to develop interest in the core realities of human trafficking in Nepal, its effects, and aftermaths.

Moreover, I was motivated to conduct this study because much research has been carried out to understand the causes and effects of human trafficking; however, there is limited literature on trafficked returnees' and their perspectives. We get to read and hear stories of survivors almost every day. The focus seems to be on the numbers of women trafficked and sometimes the conditions in which they live. What we miss is the pain and sufferings they go through even after coming out of that prison and living among their own people.

My previous experience of working in far-western regions of Nepal for an NGO as a field researcher for a sexual violence assessment project is yet another motivational factor for me to conduct this research. Meeting with women who were sexually abused and/or raped during the armed conflict of Nepal made me realize how I was living inside a protective shield isolated from what was happening in my own surroundings. I used to conduct in-depth interviews and facilitate Focus Group Discussions to learn more about the experiences of the women. Listening to the brave stories of their struggle, the level of perseverance I witnessed in those women is inexpressible. This experience made me more acquainted with the issue of human trading for sexual exploitation as some of the survivors were compelled to migrate because of the internal conflict and fell into the trap of traffickers.

According to the data published by National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] of Nepal (2012), as of 2011, more than ninety percent of the trafficking survivors recorded in Nepal police reports are female. Also, looking at the trend of recorded trafficking survivors in Nepal police reports from 2008-2011, almost fifty percent are seventeen to twenty-five years old; thirty-one percent of the survivors were children under seventeen years old; seventeen percent

were twenty-six to thirty-five years old, and; six percent of the survivors were thirty-six years old and older (NHRC, 2012, p. 19). For the purpose of this study, I have focused on the experiences of adult women, or at least women who are adults upon their return.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The core intent of this study is to learn more about challenges faced by women survivors of sex trafficking in Nepal after their return to their home areas, how survivors meet these challenges and the coping mechanisms survivors rely on in the midst of all the challenges. Additionally, the study considers actions being taken by resources in their home country of Nepal to assist survivors to reintegrate back into their communities. In doing so, the study not only focuses on the aspect of taking legal actions against perpetrators, but also intends to incorporate aspects that may offer increased opportunities to empower women, enhance their participation in civil society and ensure their basic human rights. In the pursuit of answers, my research problem has been further broken down as:

1. What are the experiences of women who have been trafficked for sex upon return to their homeland? What are their major challenges? What are the resources they have available to them and how accessible are they? How are their needs being met now? What else might they need? What gets them through the hardest times?
2. How do the service providers see the women's experiences and how their needs are met? What role do they and their agencies play in the women's reintegration? What resources can they provide? What are some of challenges they find hard to meet? What resources would they like in place? What might they like to do differently if they had more resources?

3. What kinds of laws and resources are available for women returnees? What do the documents, laws, policies say about combatting trafficking and providing support to those trafficked upon return?

In order to answer the research questions, the study applied the triangulation approach of qualitative methods using in-depth interviews with two survivors, structured interviews with four service providers and a document search to explore the services and resources available for the survivors.

Organization of Thesis

This study aims to better understand the everyday challenges survivors of sex trafficking face after they return to their homeland in Nepal. It also focuses on the services available to make their transition towards new life less troublesome for women post-return. The study has been divided into six chapters exploring the experiences shared by survivors and service providers.

The current chapter provided a brief introduction of human trafficking along with explanation of my motivation to learn more about the experiences of women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. I then explained the purpose of this particular piece of research along with research questions that will be answered in the chapters to follow.

In the second chapter, I focus on the social context of sex trafficking in Nepal including a brief history of sex trafficking in Nepal. The second chapter also explores the present situation of sex trafficking in Nepal along with an overview of existing social stigma against the women who have returned back to the country after being trafficked.

The third chapter provides a review of pertinent literature and is divided into two subsections. The first section explains about theories of demand and supply as they apply to sex

trafficking along with an overview of legal policies as well as efforts from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to help returnees lead a normal life and become self-sufficient. This section is followed by a theoretical frame of reference which includes basic human needs, empowerment and basic human rights as a base.

The fourth chapter explains the methodology used to carry out this study. This study is guided by qualitative methods using a triangulation approach including in-depth interviews with survivors, structured interviews with service providers and a search of relevant documents to try to understand the experience of women who have been trafficked and returned to their home country of Nepal. Two survivors and four service providers were interviewed for the purpose of this study. The document search was useful in learning the plans and policies introduced by the government to aid sex trafficking survivors.

The findings and analysis of this study have been divided among the final three chapters. Chapter Five shares the experiences of survivors which includes the way they were trafficked, the way they escaped and/ or were rescued from the brothel and their current situation after the return. This chapter also explores the challenges these survivors face post return, including family and community non-acceptance, economic insecurity, social stigma and mental health issues. It then explains some of the coping mechanisms these women shared which they found to be helpful to overcome the pain and suffering.

Chapter Six focuses on the efforts from government and non-governmental organizations in regards to reintegration, the services available for survivors and what else needs to be in place to support the survivors to get back on their feet. Chapter Seven then highlights the fundamental themes of the study connecting findings with the literature. Chapter Seven explains the prevalence of structural violence limiting women's access to basic needs, issues of human rights

and empowerment of survivors. Finally the chapter ends with concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT

Nepal is a land-locked country surrounded by India from the east, south and west, and by China from the north (Human Rights Watch/Asia, & Human Rights Watch, 1995) and has a population of about 26.5 million according to the census of 2011 (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] Nepal, 2013). The urban areas of the country are industrialized whereas the rural parts are still dependent on subsistence agriculture (Human Rights Watch/Asia, & Human Rights Watch, 1995, pp. 9-10). According to UNDP's Human Development Report of 2011, Nepal stands in the 157th position out of 187 countries in terms of Human Development Index and ranks 113th out of 146 countries according to the 2011 Gender Inequality Index (as cited in Banskota, 2013, pp. 8).

The practice of patriarchy has led to the poor socio-economic status of Nepalese women and is a major hindrance to their overall development (Paudel, 2011). Paudel further asserts the struggle in a woman's life starts right from her home through the process of socialization in the name of customs. I can absolutely relate to this having being born and raised in a middleclass urban household in Nepal with two other sisters. On multiple occasions my parents, especially my mother was constantly reminded by my relatives of how ill-fated they are for not having any sons and there will be no one left to take care of my parents in their old age. I am extremely fortunate as despite these inconsiderate and harmful comments, my parents raised and provided us with education as well as values. However, not everyone is fortunate as Paudel (2011) explains the patriarchal dominance in Nepal that forbids women to make their own choices or have control over their own "body, labor, income, mobility, sexuality, ideology and even identity."

Historical Background

The history of human trafficking in Nepal dates back many years when the trade was done in different forms as well as with different names. According to Jha (1997), it started in the 17th century when the ruling King of Nepal handed over his daughter to the temple in order to recover the country from natural calamities. Jha adds that the “tradition” became worse and worse in due course of time until it became a source of income for poor families primarily in western Nepal where parents started selling young girls to rich families who would then offer the girls to temples as they wished for good luck and fortune. The young girls offered to temples are known as *Deukis* which means “girls offered to God” (Jha, 1997). Jha further states that *Deukis* are usually sexually exploited by the priests in temples as well as by the rich families who buy them to offer to the temples. Reportedly the majority of *Deukis* themselves eventually end up selling their bodies to fulfill their basic needs.

Nepal is an ethnically diverse country with ethnic communities like Tamangs, Sherpas, Lamas and Gurungs who live in the remote hilly regions and are easy victims for traffickers (Human Rights Watch/Asia, & Human Rights Watch, 1995, pp. 6). In the nineteenth century, the buying and selling of women was continued and expanded by the ruling Rana regime who used to keep Tamang girls as their concubines; having a concubine meant having more prestige in society (Human Rights Watch/Asia., & Human Rights Watch, 1995, pp. 6-7). The hereditary Rana regime in Nepal was an autocratic rule led by series of Prime Ministers who ruled Nepal from 1846-1950 (History of Nepal., n.d.).

The Rana regime ended with the beginning of hereditary monarchy in Nepal in 1951, but the flesh trade did not stop and spread as far as India. This was reportedly because of the open-border policy between the two countries which was signed during the end of Rana regime

(Human Rights Watch/Asia., & Human Rights Watch, 1995). Human Rights Advocacy (2008) claims that “as the national border between Nepal and India remains open and unregulated, a number of women and children are trafficked to Indian brothels” (As cited in Deane, 2010, p. 496). According to the Rescue Foundation (n.d.), trading of women and children is easier than drug smuggling because of the 1740 mile long open border between Nepal and India. The increasing rate of unemployment and underemployment in the country has compelled thousands of Nepalese to migrate to foreign land in search of jobs (UNFPA Nepal, 2013). Deane (2010) states that the drastic increase in migration of Nepalese workforce through illegal means to other countries has tremendously increased and women have been victims of violence by their own employers. Additionally, prostitution is illegal in Nepal but not in India so with an open border the strategies and actions taken towards anti-trafficking in Nepal do not carry over to India and vice versa.

The Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN-Maoists) started an armed conflict against the government on 13th February 1996 after their forty points of demands were not met. These demands had addressed a wide range of social, political and economic agendas (Upreti, 2006). The war not only took more than 13,000 lives, displaced over 200,000, and lost billions of properties, but it also challenged 204 years of monarchy and authoritarian political regime (Upreti, 2006). The following decade-long political conflict between the ruling government and Maoist insurgents in Nepal is another factors that contributed to the rapid rise of the present sex business/trafficking problem in Nepal. According to Crawford, Kaufman, & Gurung (2007) the armed conflict compelled many men and women to migrate, and/or melt into the urban areas of the country (as cited in Kaufman and Crawford, 2011 p. 652). The conflict also resulted in the death or out migration of thousands of men and boys, creating increased pressure upon girls and

women to support their families. Many women and girls who migrated to the capital city anticipating a better life ended with insecure futures and problems with fulfilling basic needs. Women and girls in developing countries like Nepal are in deprivation as a result of the patriarchal value system (Poudel and Shrestha, 1996), which is coupled with internal conflict, domestic violence, illiteracy, unemployment, and political, social and economic inequality.

Present Context

The problem of human trafficking still persists after the political turmoil of ten years till this very day. Apart from the factors discussed above contributing to human trafficking, there are a number of aspects responsible specifically for the purpose of commercial sex trade in Nepal. They are discussed below.

Demand for young faces

One of the basic drivers of India's sex market is the increasing demand for younger females. This demand means that the brothels are compelled to continually look for more and younger women to keep up the business. The entire sex business runs depending upon the varieties of corporeal indulgence customers have and one of those demands includes the pursuit of young virgin girls (Deane, 2010). The price tag of a virgin girl is usually double to that of a girl who is not a virgin. In addition to the novelty of having sex with a young virgin, Kloer (2010) states that numbers of people in different parts of the world have an orthodox belief that sexual intercourse with a virgin girl cures sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. Of course the outcomes for the victim, Deane (2010) argues, mean that this particular kind of sexual exploitation has a long lasting impact on the body and minds of these young women, some of which includes "HIV

infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, health consequences, physical abuse, psychological trauma, and the stigma of sexual abuse” (p. 498).

India’s growing sex industry

The economy of India is growing at a very high speed. Deane (2010) believes that the economy of India is increasing and one of the major factors is because they have cheap labor. As a result of this, there is significant decrease in wages leading to increase in demand for child labor.

Because of the lower wages in typical jobs, of course the jobs that provide higher income seem more appealing (Deane, 2010, pp. 496). Trafficking Report (2009) states that “traffickers, especially those in the commercial sex industry, capitalize and use the lure of more profitable opportunities to trick women into the profession” (As cited in Deane, 2010, p. 496). Thus, the girls from poverty stricken rural communities of Nepal become an easy target for the brothel brokers.

Globalization

Shifman (2003) states that globalization encourages “new routes and new methods to exploit women and children for profit” because “women and children can now be sold on the internet” (p. 125). Merry (2009) also explains that globalization has made the world so small that with one click on the internet, people are able to market pornography and sex workers (p. 93). Shifman (2003), through her interviews with four women activists’ points out that globalization itself is not a curse but its abuse is the major problem (p. 127). One of Shifman’s interviewee’s uses the term “cultural colonialism” according to which advertisements and television programs glamorize the western world, in particular as a place where nothing goes wrong (p.128) and

therefore encourages those who seek a better life to take risks they might not otherwise make. Shifman further states that it is easy to manipulate somebody who has lived in relative deprivation, which is why rather than calling this security seeking movement their choice she calls it “risk taking” seeking a better future.

In the case of Nepal, on one hand “cultural colonialism” causes some women to migrate and on the other hand some women are compelled to migrate to meet their basic needs knowing the risk of getting into sex industry. Stanojoska (n.d.) considers migration to be the outgrowth of economic globalization that manifests strong push and pull factors (p. 3). She further explains that the social conditions of countries of origin are the push factors such as poverty, unemployment, conflicts, violence, etc. Similarly pull factors are the elements that destination countries offer such as economic stability, security and a better way of living (p. 4). This will be described further in the next chapter.

Existing Social Stigma after Return

It is difficult to fully understand the challenges of women once they return to their home country after having been trafficked. According to Brunovskis and Surtees (2013) sex trafficking returnees are hesitant to open up about their experience in the brothel due to fear of being labelled as a “prostitute, or failed migrant”, or even held responsible for what happened to them (pp. 455). One of the factors responsible for this is the prevalence of social prejudices against trafficked returnees in Nepalese society one of which is social stigma.

Link and Phelan (2001) explain stigma to be an outcome of the combination of four components: “labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation” (pp. 367). Link and Phelan explain labelling as society’s tendency to categorize

human differences such color of skin, sexual orientation, etc. Similarly, the labelled individual is considered to possess undesirable attributes, further developing negative stereotyping. Moreover, stereotypes about labelled individuals create a feeling of “us” versus “them” and separates the individuals from rest of the society. The individuals then experience status loss and discrimination. All these stigma-leading components are controlled by the individuals holding social, cultural, political, and economic power (Link and Phelan, 2001).

In the case of Nepal, women who have returned home after being trafficked are usually labelled as prostitutes. Simkhada (2008) states due to traditional norms and values of society, returnees are psychologically stigmatised fearing being unaccepted by their family and/or community. Apart from the existing social stigma, Vijayarasa and Stein (2010) pointed out that very limited research has been done to explain the stigmatisation resulting from sex trafficking and HIV AIDS. According to a study on Nepalese girls and women trafficked for sexual exploitation, it was found that 109 out of 287 girls and women (38 percent) were HIV positive (Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwari, Willis, & Raj, 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter shared some history about the trend of sex trafficking in Nepal, which started back in the seventeenth century - from the period of the Malla Kings - and continues to this day. It explored the causes behind the boom in the sex trade of women which grew out of contrived religious reasons in the past to today’s extra demand of gaining profit by selling women’s bodies. Some of the trend described in the current scenario included the increasing demand for young virgins, India’s booming sex business, and the abuse of globalization. Finally the chapter ends with an overview of existing social stigma for sex trafficking returnees. In the following chapter

of literature review, I explain in more detail the causes and consequences of sex trafficking along with a theoretical framework explaining the needs and rights of survivors upon their return to their homeland.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mcgirk (1997) argues that trafficking of young women for prostitution from Nepal to India has been the busiest “slavery traffic” of its kind anywhere across the globe (As cited in Deane, 2010). The major contributing factors to trafficking in Nepal include gender inequality, poverty, lack of education and awareness, post-conflict displacement, and prevalence of structural violence among others (Simkhada, 2008). The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) notes that there are supply and demand factors that contribute to the increasing trend of trafficking (As cited in Deane, 2010, p. 494). Deane further asserts that the demand and supply factors are the product of societal values that further put people at higher risk of being trafficked (p. 495).

This section will first consider demand theory, its definition and essence, followed by a look at supply theory. Next will be an examination of the influences of patriarchy, structural violence, the feminization of poverty and the social practices that support these. Moving from the causes of trafficking, a brief section on responses to trafficking is shared. Following, will be the literature’s consideration of what women need to survive and thrive if they do survive their ordeal and return home. We consider basic needs theory, empowerment and basic human rights. The question remains how well these basics are being met.

Demand theory

In the study of economics, demand is the quantity of product the consumer is willing to buy (Heakal, n.d.). In addition, Heakal explains the inverse relation between amount of product’s demand and its price through the law of demand. In simple terms, the law of demand asserts that as the price of a product rises, there will be less quantity of product on demand and vice-versa

(Heakal, n.d.). The rising rate of human trafficking is backed by the increasing demand for cheap labor and/or commercial sex business, less risk factor and high profits (Polaris, n.d.). Apart from these direct demand factors, Huda (2006) explains demand as any form of actions that encourage exploitation which in turn makes people vulnerable to trafficking (p. 11). To support this argument, MacKinnon (2005) gives an example of “digital pornography” where through a virtual image of an individual, sexual exploitation is promoted (as cited in Huda, 2006, p. 11).

Hughes (2004) categorizes the demand for women (victims) for commercial sex into three divisions: customers or purchasers of sex, profiteers from selling sex, and culture that normalizes commercial sex attitudes. Customers or purchasers are the ones who pay money to acquire sexual service. Profiteers are those such as brothel owners and pimps who gain from selling the victims. Culture that normalizes the commercialization of sex is evidenced in the way the media plays its eminent role in glamorizing commercial sex, which changes people’s perception towards it as a harmless business (Hughes 2004).

The demand for prostitution has a tremendous effect on the increase of trafficking of innocent women for unwilling prostitution. By ‘prostitution’ I refer to the definition by Oxford Dictionary which describes it as “The practice or occupation of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment”. There is the implication that both parties are willing to participate. Hughes (2004) asserts that usually the buyers of the service of prostitutes are a diversified group having different wants and intents towards sex including buyers longing to experience exotic sex. This is supported by the fact that there is no emotional attachment with prostitutes and some even perceive that it is fine to commit sexual violence (experimentation) towards prostitutes. Because of these issues the demand for prostitutes is increasing further boosting the trafficking business. Anuradha Koirala, the founder of Maiti Nepal (an NGO working against human

trafficking in Nepal) asserted that the high demand for young girls between six and nine years of age is related to the belief that having sex with young girls cures HIV/AIDS and other STD's (Tremonti, 2013).

Hughes (2004) further states that the profiteers gain by delivering the victims to the buyers. These profiteers comprise “traffickers, pimps, brothel owners, and supporting corrupt officials” (p. 2). The major motive behind this business for these people is the economic gain they receive out of it. To carry out this work on transnational basis they have their own organized crime networks (Hughes, 2004, pp. 2).

Lastly Hughes (2004) argues that social media has a huge impact in romanticizing this crime syndicate. Hughes further asserts that media influences people by “normalizing prostitution” and portraying it as a “victimless crime” (p. 2-3). Similar arguments have been made by liberal/post-modern/sex work feminists regarding the deconstruction of anti-trafficking discourses and sexual labor as a medium of empowerment for women (Limoncelli, 2009).

All these factors relate to the demand for women and children to be sold across borders for sexual exploitation. They also partially explain why it is so difficult to stop this practice. Some other factors acting as hurdles are deeply rooted patriarchal values and structural violence, both of which are discussed later in this chapter.

Supply Theory

According to Heakal (n.d.), supply is the quantity of goods that the producers are willing and able to provide consumers and the availability of the goods often depends on the price level. Thus, the law of supply states that as the prices go higher, the supply of goods will also increase because the suppliers desire to gain more revenue (Heakal, n.d.). Huda (2006) argues that supply

itself is not a driving force of demand but “economic, social, legal, political, institutional and cultural conditions” make women highly susceptible to being trafficked which is why both demand and supply factors equally foster sex trafficking (p. 14).

The supply factors in the case of trafficking in Nepal mostly involve structural causes as noted in the following sections.

Gender discrimination

Gender is one of the key determinants of social identity and is believed to be ‘socially constructed’ (Jeong, 2000). Merry (2009) asserts that gender constitutes the social aspects of sex differences between men and women, and “is the product primarily of cultural processes of learning and socialization rather than of innate biological differences” (p. 9). With regards to gender inequality, Merry (2009) explains the public/private dichotomy where women are expected to be in the private sphere immune from “politics, power and authority” (p. 9). Thus, men and women are expected to demonstrate their respective behavior of masculinity and femininity. In the case of Nepalese society where dominant masculinity is prevalent, the voices of women are often suppressed. In other words, women remain as second class citizens with no decision making power for themselves. This makes women highly vulnerable to fall in the trap of traffickers; for example a woman who suffers a wide range of violence at the household level either may choose to remain quiet or look for an alternative which may also put her at risk to violence. This situation is a huge advantage for traffickers and they easily manipulate innocent women by providing fake emotional as well economic support (Koirala Sol-Kanee Lecture, 2013).

Patriarchy and domination

Patriarchy is the central concept that determines virtually all human enterprises while illustrating the historical and social dimensions of women's exploitation and oppression.

(Jeong, 2000, p.79)

Patriarchy can be considered as a structural force that influences the social relations of power between men and women (Jeong, 2000, p. 79-80). Nepalese society is highly characterized by a strong patriarchal culture. Jeong (2000) explains about the social segregation of men and women where men are encouraged to display masculine behaviors such as being aggressive, controlling, and physically strong, likewise women are expected to bear feminine characteristics like compassion, caring, and nurturing (p. 76-77). This hierarchy in the construction of gender identities always portrays men as being ahead of women in almost every sphere of life (p. 80). Nepalese society has strong patriarchal values that give license to men to oppress women in the name of culture. One most common example was given by Anuradha Koirala in an interview with CBC explaining the situation in villages of Nepal where girls are sent by their families to cities with strangers in the name of 'big job opportunity' (Tremonti, 2013). She further described the attitude of financial burden of having a girl child in terms of her education and marriage, but in the case of sons' spending money is seen as an investment for the future as sons are the ones who look after their parents. The control and power men have over the lives of women is culturally accepted because most rural communities in Nepal have male members as the head of family. This strong male domination backed by cultural practices and the economic backwardness of rural communities makes women more vulnerable to being trafficked.

Structural Violence

Structural violence against women can be considered as both cause and consequence of sex trafficking in Nepal. Peace scholars have defined structural violence as a form of violence prevalent in the social system, imposed directly or indirectly leading to a degrading quality of life (Jeong, 2000, p. 20-21). Galtung (1969) explains violence without a clear subject-object relation as structural violence and the term “social injustice” as synonymous to structural violence (p. 171). Galtung further asserts that “in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there is no concrete actor one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another” (p. 171). This example clearly describes structural violence.

Galtung’s typology of violence further offers greater insight into the ‘construction’ of violence in relation to direct physical violence, structural, and cultural violence. Galtung (1990) explains that cultural and structural (invisible) violence causes visible direct violence, while direct violence reinforces structural and cultural violence. Defined as “any aspect of culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form”, Galtung (1990) asserts “cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right-or at least not wrong” (p. 291). In addition, the direct and structural violence experienced by women who have been trafficked, along with their exclusion from rehabilitation and reconstruction projects within the country, represents a significant barrier to their reintegration into society when they do return to their home areas.

Feminization of poverty

A large portion of the rural female population in Nepal does not have enough knowledge or education and/or access to markets to be financially independent and this has led to the feminization of poverty. Women are underpaid as compared to men and have limited to no access and control over the resources (Shakya, 2009, p. 32). The deficiency of feasible economic options coupled with low paid jobs for women has a huge adverse impact on women as compared to men.

Besides this, Nepalese women are marginalized and deprived of their rights to land ownership and access to parental property because of the prevalence of unfair laws and practices. A little attempt to make change to provide women with property rights includes the 'Eleventh Amendment of the Country Code Bill' in 2002, and the 'Act to Amend Some Nepal Acts for Maintaining Gender Equality' 2063 (2006) which states that: "the unmarried girl, married women or a widow living separately may enjoy the movable and immovable property on her own" (UNDP 2010, p. 48). However, this still marginalizes and discriminates against women because only a married woman can claim this right if she obtains it before getting married. It is a demoralizing condition for women where they face discrimination in every step in their quest to break away from poverty which consequently compels them to migrate and become highly prone to being trafficked.

Social practices further supporting inequality

The social norms and practices prevalent in Nepalese society can also be considered as a factor that makes women vulnerable to trafficking. The practice of child marriage is one such social evil that is still practiced in many rural parts of Nepal. Deane (2010) states that the “parents

themselves sometimes sell their daughters, while husbands of trafficked women sell their unwanted wives to brothels for approximately US\$200 to \$600” (p. 495). Culturally, in Nepal there is preference for sons over daughters, who are considered as burdens of the family until they get married. Even during the marriage process a huge sum of money or property, known as the dowry is given to the groom’s side. In this way girls are indirectly sold by their own families in the name of marriage. Also there is no guarantee that the groom’s family will keep the bride with them because there have been many cases where women are sold by their husbands after marriage.

Efforts towards Rescue and Reintegration

According to *Anbeshi*, a yearly book report on Violence against Women, forty-three percent of women between the ages of 17-25 years are highly vulnerable to being trafficked (Banskota, 2013, p. 123). The report also claimed that ninety-three percent of trafficking survivors were literate but because of lack of economic opportunities in their homeland, become easy victims into the trap of traffickers and middlemen (Banskota, 2013, p. 128). Various statistics are provided however Nepal lacks an “Information Management System” to provide exact data regarding trafficking (NHRC, 2012, p. 16) which is why the statistics don’t always tell the whole story. The report by NHRC also asserts that even though migration information is gathered through various national surveys, there is no particular method to provide the statistical data on sex trafficking except for the ones provided by different organizations which are “often made with reference to brothel-based sex work in India” (NHRC, 2012, p. 17).

More fortunate women trafficked for sexual exploitation may be rescued by NGOs with the help of local police and sometimes they manage to escape on their own under very dangerous

circumstances (Koirala Round-table, 2013). There is no ‘one rule’ when it comes to rescuing the women who have been trafficked. One of the most common rescue methods is when a non-governmental organization (NGO), with the help of local police, raids a brothel. Koirala explained that the rescued women are first taken to the police station where sometimes, as this study shows, they are treated very badly and are accused of being cheap. The women are then hopefully taken to the shelter home of the NGO. This study attempted to find the ways in which women are rescued in more detail through the interviews with survivors and service providers.

With respect to rehabilitation and reintegration, it is argued that there is an extreme level of disgrace linked to trafficking returnees in rural parts of Nepal (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008). The authors outline a fundamental assumption that the survivor has become polluted and/or a bad influence on society and this assumption is a major hindrance in the reintegration process and leaves a deep scar in their dignity. According to Crawford and Kaufman (2008), even the whole idea of reintegration seems pointless in a society where women trafficked for sexual exploitation are considered “dead meat” and more concentration should be towards formulating preventive anti-trafficking strategies as well as punishing the culprit (p. 909).

NGOs have made attempts to help survivors get back with their families through occasional meetings, life skill trainings as well as providing “seed money” to the survivors to make them economically capable (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008). However, according to Crawford (2005), there is lack of government commitment in terms of financial aid and monitoring the results of reintegration process, while much focus is towards pleasing the funding agencies (As cited in Crawford and Kaufman, 2008).

Legal actions against trafficking

Various laws and acts have been passed by the government of Nepal in order to oust trafficking from the roots. The very first code of Law known as *Muluki Ain*, 1963, has the provision of 20 years of prison for a trafficker involved in international trafficking and 10 years for domestic trade (UNODC, 2009, p. 251). Then the Human Trafficking Control Act 1986 covered a wider range in its definition of trafficking by including trade of human beings for any reason, slavery as bonded labor, and working in the sex trade among others (Ibid). According to UNODC (2009), these acts have been criticised for not taking any initiatives towards protection of survivors' human rights as well as minimum to zero provisions for rescue and rehabilitation. (p. 252).

The most recent legal document is the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act (HTTCA) 2064 (2007) following which the Government of Nepal formulated Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Rules (HTTCR) 2065 (2008) that has attempted to incorporate trafficking returnees' voices and needs. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW) is the major Government body working towards combatting human trafficking in Nepal (Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare [MOWCSW], 2013). Section 23 of the HTTCA 2064 (2007) ordered the formation of the National Committee and District Committees to work alongside with the government as well as non-governmental bodies (Nepal Law Commission, 2007). MOWCSW stipulates the National Committee (MOWCSW, 2013) and District committees are monitored by the National Committee (Nepal Law Commission, 2008). One of the provisions of HTTCR 2065 (2008) is the right of the complainant to remain confidential by keeping their name anonymous (Nepal Law Commission, 2008). The other provision of this Rule is establishment of District Committee cooperated

rehabilitation centres that can be run by non-governmental organizations in a contract basis (Ibid). The document also explains about the provision of proper infrastructures for victims' in the centre along with medical facilities as well as legal support, and initiation of family reunion (Ibid). The Rule also has a provision of rehabilitation funds to ease victims' transition in their new life (Ibid). In addition to these provisions, more information about the government led works have been explained in the findings section of this study based on the document search.

The term "victim" has been used time and again in the legal document; I believe this has become a demeaning terminology for trafficked women. I believe "survivor" or "returnee" is more respectful because these women are much more than victims. They have tackled so many challenges, continue to struggle with one every day and come out stronger than ever.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs in Nepal play a crucial role in combating trafficking as they are the reality check, the accountability people, and their voice is absolutely essential. Samarasinghe (2008) explains the vital role played by NGOs to tackle trafficking through three P's; namely, prevention of trafficking, protection of post trafficked victims and prosecution of traffickers (p. 85). Some of the NGO's contributions include developing and implementing programs that support the victims with rescue operations, conducting awareness campaigns targeting the vulnerable population in rural areas, providing security to the rescued victims, helping to track down the traffickers, and many others. However, inadequate surveillance and evaluation of projects after completion is a major problem contributing to the failure of anti-trafficking actions. Samarasinghe (2008) further asserts that most of the NGOs are located and work in cities of Nepal because of which they are not fully able to reach out to the grassroots. But the tables are turning and the scenario is

changing where the NGOs are working hard to touch the base and fight against trafficking. They advocate against poverty, gender discrimination and the open border between India and Nepal as they see these to be the major reasons behind increasing rate of trafficking. Moreover, nepotism, stereotypical thinking, inadequate coaching and lack of caring attitudes among elite policy makers to formulate and execute productive programs are some additional barriers to prevent trafficking (Samarasinghe, 2008, p. 87).

The important work of assisting women to a better life once they have been trafficked may provide clues as to how to change the structures of societies that perpetrate and perpetuate these crimes. This study of women returnees who are survivors of trafficking explore these issues using the theories of basic human needs, empowerment, and basic human rights as a base.

Peacebuilding Theories Supporting This Research

Basic needs theory

While not considered a peace scholar per se, Abraham Maslow introduced the hierarchy of needs theory according to which human beings thrive through fulfillment of physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow further categorized physiological needs as fundamental requirements of food, clothing, and shelter; safety needs as security, law and order, and a feeling of fearlessness. Similarly, the need for intimacy and affection from loved ones comes under love and belongingness needs. Likewise, esteem needs comprise the feeling of accomplishment, conviction, and respect. Self-actualization needs cover an individuals' realization of self-worth, and personal development (Maslow, 1943)

Peace scholar, John Burton (1997a) asserts basic needs (food, shelter, security, and self-identity) as ontological whereas interests and values are temporal, and stresses the fact that basic needs can never be curbed or negotiated (as cited in Jeong 2000 p. 71). Human needs theory, as described by John Burton also argues that oppression resulting from poverty, racism and sexism, among others, frustrates the human need for development, recognition and identity (Burton, 1990, p. 46).

The deprivation of fundamental needs drives women into the trap of traffickers in the quest to fulfill their families' need to meet ends. However, even when their physiological needs are met upon their return, the needs of security, communal acceptance and mutual understanding, and self-identity (Jeong 2000, p. 69) remain unfulfilled for the trafficking returnees, further marginalizing them. Based on these views, unfulfilled basic needs can be linked to the cause and consequence of sex trafficking in Nepalese scenario. Thus, reduction in poverty, economic equity and social justice are the vital requirements in solving the problems of basic needs (Jeong 2000, p. 71). This can be achieved by developing a feeling of inclusion among people and by empowering them to meet those needs (Jeong, [2003] 2008 p. 182).

Empowerment

One of the major purposes of the entire rescue and rehabilitation process is to make the survivor self-reliant and enhance their self-esteem. Schwerin (1995) explains that power is the major ingredient for empowerment and therefore it is crucial to incorporate various power factors in order to understand the concept of empowerment. Rollo May describes four different power relationships. The first is 'power over' which executes domination and oppression. Likewise the second is 'power against' which increases rivalry. The third is 'power for' or 'nutrient' and the

fourth is ‘power with’ or ‘integrative power’ both of which May describes as being constructive in nature (as cited in Schwerin, 1995, p. 72). Schwerin (1995) also argues that the ‘power for’ concept is not entirely empowering as in certain cases it is identified to make individuals dependent on expert knowledge rather than making them self-reliant (p. 72-73). Boulding refers to integrative power or power with as “truly empowering” (as cited in Schwerin, p. 73). Schwerin (1995) also states that integrative power designs and creates a positive space between individuals which in turn fosters “personal and political empowerment” (p. 73). However, in the Nepalese scenario it is pretty evident there is more prevalence of the first two types of power relationships (power over and power against) which can be considered as a vital factor preventing women from personal, economic and social empowerment.

One of the major purposes of the entire rescue and rehabilitation process is to make the survivor self-reliant and enhance their self-esteem. According to Schwerin (1995) there are eight major components of empowerment, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, knowledge and skills, political awareness, social participation, political participation, political rights and responsibilities, and access to resources. Being empowered means to be able to exercise all these attributes and/or the ability to exercise agency (Malhotra & Shulen, 2005).

Schwerin (1995) also asserts that the empowerment process is fundamentally guided by the quest to fulfill basic human needs and is linked to “humanistic values such as social justice, freedom, equality, diversity, and transcendence” (p. 83). The empowerment model explains the relationship between human needs and empowerment, according to which individuals strive to fulfill their basic needs by interacting with other individuals to increase their social and political participation (Schwerin, 1995, p. 84). Schwerin further states that increased social and political participation empowers people as it strengthens their morale, enhances knowledge about their

rights and responsibilities, and develops skills to better utilize the resources. Thus, in this regard all the components of empowerment work towards bringing the empowerment process into action.

In the case of sex trafficking returnees' in Nepal, economic empowerment through life skill trainings is considered one of the most successful methods to reintegrate into the community (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008). The authors further argue that in a country where the majority of rural families have difficulty fulfilling their everyday basic needs, if the returnee is able to support them economically, they are very much likely to be accepted by the family and community gradually (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008, p. 914). This is one way that shows how the successful re-entry and reintegration process assists women in their own empowerment and that requires access to basic needs. These are inter-connected as empowerment helps people access their basic needs and participate in society which in turn helps with empowerment.

Human rights

Merry (2009) asserts “sex trafficking is an example of an issue newly defined as a human rights violation” (p. 98). Trafficked women experience a wide range of sufferings which include physical as well as mental violence, isolation from the outside world, no control over income, and some are even forced to give their passports to the brothel owners so that they cannot leave the territory (Merry, 2009 p. 94). Anuradha Koirala shared the story of a trafficked woman who died after she was brought back from brothel and the priests demanded extra charge to perform her last rites only because she had AIDS (Tremonti, 2013). Koirala further questions people who talk about rights but do not care when an innocent girl loses her childhood, her maidenhood and even at her deathbed is deprived of her rights.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Article 4 of the UDHR states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (United Nations, 1949). Even though trafficking is now considered as a modern form of slavery (Deane, 2010), the Article has not been able to incorporate this issue to its very roots. Likewise, Article 5 of the UDHR states that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (United Nations, 1949). However, the inability to guarantee women’s right to equal protection under the law from sex trade is a major shortfall of this universally accepted document.

Similarly, there is a widespread violation of human rights during and in the aftermaths of conflicts. One such violation is trading of women for sexual services (Ní, Haynes, & Cahn, 2011 p. 115). The authors have provided the brutal reality of trafficking of young girls as young as eleven to fourteen years, and women in the DRC who were sexually abused by the peacekeepers in exchange for food and other goods (p. 116). Likewise, in the case of Nepal crime networks increased in post-conflict situation as a result of the open Nepal-India border which induced the movement of women and children of Nepal to India for cheap labor and sex (Leatherman, 2011). While the ultimate goal of ensuring basic human rights may currently be out of reach for many existing survivors in Nepal, it is a goal which our society can strive for by implementing projects which promote human rights and human dignity. The focus of these projects and method for implementation varies depends on the social context and needs of the society.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research methods to understand the experience of sex trafficking survivors including how they cope with the challenges of reintegration upon their return to Nepal. Berg (2001) states that a qualitative approach “seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (p. 6). A qualitative approach takes into consideration the ideas and perceptions of individuals and also “examines how people learn about and make sense of themselves and the others” (Berg, 2001, p. 7). This approach also seeks to empower individuals by bringing forward their stories and experiences that have remained unspoken and unacknowledged (Hesse-Biber, 2010). In addition, qualitative research methods provide a vivid picture of “social reality” by remaining unbiased and not benefitting only the ones with power and authority (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 456). In this regard a qualitative approach “promotes a deep listening between the researcher and the researched” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 456).

One form or tool of qualitative research is the in-depth interview which has been used in this study to share the experiences of survivors. I have used a triangulation research method approach to the question. According to Berg (2001), triangulation refers to “the use of multiple data-gathering techniques (usually three) to investigate the same phenomenon” (p. 5). First, I conducted in-depth interviews with two survivors; second, I interviewed four key service providers about the challenges and resources they see are there for women as well as what is missing, and; third, I did a document search examining the literature for resources for women returnees in Nepal.

In-depth interviews were conducted to learn about the experiences two sex-trafficking survivors had upon returning home and attempting re-integration to their home communities. Guion L.A. et al., (2011) describes the in-depth interview as a method of qualitative research that uses a semi-structured format of questioning and attempts to look deeper into the participants' perspectives about a certain matter. One of the key skills in conducting in-depth interviews is the researcher's ability to control the flow of conversation (Crossman, n.d.) along with good listening skills, note-taking, recording, and effective probing to get the best results (Guion L.A. et al., 2011). I have some facility with these skills and familiarity with survivors because of my previous experience as a field researcher for a sexual violence assessment project in Nepal. Throughout this experience, I witnessed multiple human emotions (anger, sadness, happiness, fear) listening to individuals' life experiences which creates a bonding between researcher and participant. This is one of the fundamental reasons for choosing an in-depth interview method as it helps create deeper understanding of individuals' experiences. According to Siedman (2013), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Sideman (2013) also asserts interviewing as a "mode of inquiry" where by individuals recount experiences in the form of shared narrative through language (p. 8).

Participants

The survivors

This study is focused on the experiences of two survivors who were trafficked for sexual exploitation and have returned back to their own country. The field area for this study is Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, my home city. Since I have previous experience

interviewing women who have been through trauma,, I was aware that this study could take longer than anticipated, finding participants who might be willing to talk about their experiences, though I did not want to ask them about their experience of being trafficked. Also, because of the sensitivity of the issue it was crucial to be extra careful while reaching out to survivors. To prepare, I did some ground-work in the summer of 2014 during an extended visit to Nepal. I conducted preliminary searches of government documents to acquaint myself with some of the resources for survivors. I also spoke with people I already knew who worked with survivors. At that time I learned about the privacy concerns of non-governmental organizations for the safety of survivors as well as the need to be cautious when going into villages hoping to meet survivors. I discovered that some survivors return home without letting anyone know about being sold in the brothel due to fear of rejection. Thus, it was very important to keep their identity safe and protect them from any other risk. While my hope was to interview more participants if at all possible, in the end I believe I was fortunate to have met the two women I did interview. What they shared was deeply personal and difficult as will be shared in the next chapters.

For privacy concerns both participants were provided pseudonyms which they decided to choose themselves. My first participant chose ‘Maya’ which means ‘love’ in Nepali. She shared she chose the name because she feels there is lack of affection in people’s hearts and her name could be a small message for people to spread love and compassion every time they read or hear her experience. Likewise, my second participant also chose a pseudonym, ‘Pema’, for herself and said she did not have any specific reason behind choosing that particular name but wanted to keep her identity protected.

In order to reach out to the survivors, I used a snowball sampling method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) based on my connections and experiences in the community. My first point of

contact was the psycho-social counsellor with whom I had the opportunity to work for a year at Himalayan Human Rights Monitors (NGO working for the rights of individuals) for a Sexual Violence Assessment Project. She has worked for many NGOs as psycho-social counsellor and is currently working at International Committee of the Red Cross in Nepal as a counsellor. She was also present with me as an observer during the interviews with survivors. Given the sensitivity of the issue, it was anticipated that the participants might be reluctant to open up with the researcher which is why having a psycho-social counsellor was very helpful in reaching out to the women, and in providing any needed psychological support. It is generally quite difficult to have access to survivors because of the privacy concerns.

The psychosocial counsellor made arrangements for me to meet with the first participants. To approach the participants, I wrote a letter of introduction inviting the survivors to meet with me. I outlined the purpose of my research in the letter and also made it clear that they were not obligated to speak with me if they did not want to. The psychosocial counsellor presented women with the letter of introduction and then let the women decide whether or not they would like to meet with me or not. Also since the psycho-social counsellor had been in contact with the participants through different trafficking related programs, the participants were more comfortable to express their opinions in her presence.

Maya, my first participant with whom I met three times while I was in Nepal preferred to meet with me in presence of the psycho-social counsellor for the first two meetings. For our third meeting, she informed me that she was comfortable to talk to me without the presence of the psychosocial counsellor. Our first two meetings were held in the psychosocial counsellor's home office and were recorded. For our third meeting, we went to a quiet coffee shop and the conversation was not recorded as per the participant's request. Likewise, I met with the second

participant twice and both times the psychosocial counsellor was present. The interviews with the second participant were also conducted at the psychosocial counsellor's office and were recorded.

Because of my previous experience, I knew the importance of taking some natural breaks from the conversation as it can be extremely draining and at times bring back difficult past memories. While interviewing both participants I made sure that they were comfortable throughout which is why reading their body language I checked with them every now and then during the interviews and asked them if they were tired or wanted to continue the conversation another time. I realized it is very important to be reflexive in the process. Both participants later expressed that they were at ease while talking to me and felt the interview to be more like a conversation where they were able to pour their hearts out.

The service providers

Besides interviews with survivors, I also conducted interviews with four service providers from organizations, namely Maiti Nepal, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal, and Asia Foundation to explore the initiatives taken to support the reintegration of sex trafficking survivors. Maiti Nepal was chosen because of its untiring work since November 1993 towards anti-trafficking and advocacy against human rights violations of men, women and children (Maiti Nepal, n.d.). I interviewed the information officer of Maiti Nepal.

Similarly, the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal has been continuously working since 1991 for the promotion of human rights and fights against all forms of violence against women. I interviewed the senior program coordinator at WOREC Nepal.

Likewise, a service provider from the Asia Foundation was also interviewed for this study. The Asia Foundation is a non-profit international organization which has been working in eighteen Asian countries and Washington DC for about six decades in areas like good governance, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, etc. (The Asia Foundation, n.d.).

Lastly, the psycho-social counsellor was also interviewed as one of the service providers because of her many years of work experience in the area of human trafficking. I asked the service providers to speak about the role NGOs play in the rescue and reintegration process, the state of survivors when they are rescued and what support system is available to help them cope with the trauma, what kind of legal support system are there to assist survivors? And how do they help survivors get back to their feet socially as well as economically.

In addition, the study includes a search of documents such as annual reports of NGO's, legal documents from Nepal Law Commission and document by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare relating to human trafficking survivors was retrieved and reviewed. These documents were useful to understand the trend of human trafficking, its causes and effects, and also the acts and laws passed to combat trafficking. The document search is crucial for this research as it contributes to ensure reliability and validity of the research work.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were conducted in the Nepali language. The data analysis began after all the interviews were transcribed and then translated in to English. Creswell (2007) explains that the qualitative research analysis process involves proper organization of collected data followed by coding to develop meaningful themes and lastly reporting the findings (pp. 148).

Following every interview, I made sure to transcribe them the same day or at the latest by the next day and also took separate notes of the things I observed during the interviews. I was extremely careful while translating the experiences shared by participants and wanted their stories to be authentic and delivered in a respectful manner. I typed all the interviews on MS-Word, printed them and separated the documents of each individual participant for easy access. Denscombe (2007) explains the need to read the data multiple times in order to gain “familiarity with the data” (pp. 290) and this proved to be helpful in this study as well. Re-reading and/or re-listening to data helps in recollecting significant incidences of the surroundings during interviews as “silences and spaces” are considered extremely relevant in qualitative data analysis (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 290-291).

After reviewing them, the transcripts were coded using line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding helps to identify relevant codes while assisting the researcher in minimizing the risk of missing any important category and also introduces significant codes which might be relevant towards an emergent study (Holton, 2010). Categorization is the next step after coding which reduces complex interview texts in to simple organized categories (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Furthermore, themes were identified using the categories, field notes and memos. Denscombe (2007) identifies memos as an invaluable technique for qualitative researchers to keep track of new ideas and insights that might emerge while coding and categorizing (pp. 295). Finally, the identified themes were discussed in written form relating to the theories discussed earlier in the study as well as providing meaning to the valuable experiences shared by the participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTUALIZING SEX TRAFFICKING THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

This chapter explores the various facets of sex trafficking in Nepal from the perspectives of the survivors and service providers I interviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted with two survivors of sex trafficking and four service providers from different organizations working against human trafficking. The first section explains the survivors' understanding of sex trafficking followed by their thoughts about the causes of sex trafficking in Nepal. Next, I explore the ways in which Nepalese women and girls are being trafficked. I will then touch upon the experience of survivors when they are in brothels. Finally, I will explain how these particular survivors were rescued/escaped from the brothel.

I have tried to share the participants' perspectives in their words as translated from the original language of the interview. Since the participants were interviewed in Nepali, I have attempted to be as close as possible to the meaning conveyed by them and honour their experiences while translating them to English for the purpose of this study. The survivors chose pseudonyms Maya and Pema in order to protect their identities.

Sex Trafficking Causes and Processes

In order to learn about the survivors' understanding about sex trafficking before they were trafficked I asked them if they had ever heard of the term *Cheli-beti Bechbikhan* (sex trafficking). Both survivors did not have any understanding of the term 'sex trafficking' prior to being trafficked. Maya said,

I heard that term for the very first time in my life when I reached the brothel. I was shocked to know that even people can be sold for money just like we used to sell

chickens and goats in my village, but it was too late to understand as I was already in hell.

Pema shared similar views,

Back in the village people used to talk about girls who used to disappear and say they have become prostitutes in cities. I always thought people were making up stories to scare girls. Never in my dreams had I imagined people could trick and deceive women to sell them and make money out of them. After meeting many other Nepalese, Indian, Bangladeshi and Sri-Lankan girls in the brothel I realized selling girls like us is a very big lucrative business.

When asked about the factors leading to sex trafficking, service providers put forward multiple factors including poverty, lack of education, lack of awareness, gender discrimination, and decades long armed conflict among others. Maya, however, recalled her life before she left her village nine years ago when she was 19.

I come from a very poor farmer's family. I used to help my parents run household chores and sell vegetables in the market whenever needed. I never had a chance to go to school but my little brother used to. I always remember my father telling me *Ta 'Poila jane jaat lai padayera ke kaam?'* (What is the use of educating you when you are going to elope one day?)

This is an excellent example of the existence of patriarchal dominance where the preference of son over daughter is prevalent. Maya continued,

I left my village willingly with a man at the age of 19 after falling in love with him. He was from another village and he also used to come to sell vegetables in the market. He took me to Mumbai where we stayed with his relatives for a week. He promised to marry

me once he found a job for both of us and a place to live. He used to force me to have sexual relations with him and raped me multiple times. His aunt would make me do all household chores and never let me leave the house. One day he came and told me had found a job for me to work as a maid and that our bad days were over. We met a lady at a nearby shop where she said she would take me to show her house and explain to me my work. She turned out to be one of the agents of the brothel owner. She locked me in one of the rooms in the house and came back the next morning with food and asked me to get ready for work. She compelled me to wear very revealing clothing along with a lot of makeup and when I tried to refuse to do any of that she said the guy had sold me to the brothel owner for 18,000 Indian Rupees.

Maya's story confirmed the research noting that deception is used as tactic to sell young women into the brothels of India. The service provider from Maiti Nepal mentioned other means used to traffic women such as forged marriages, and fake employment opportunities for which traffickers even convince the girls' parents. Most of the time, the trafficker is a known person (usually a relative), and if not the individual otherwise persuades girls and/or their families providing false hopes of earning a lot of money in the city. Pema recalled a similar story.

I lived with my parents and two younger sisters and had a miserable life back in the village. My father was an alcoholic and used to beat my mother most nights accusing her for not giving him a son. I grew up looking at all the hardships my mother went through and I, along with my siblings, led a life of deprivation.

When I was eighteen I learned through one of my friends that we could work in a carpet factory in Kathmandu city and this friend agreed to help me find a job there. I was very desperate to help my mother and my siblings in any possible way so I ran away from

the village one night. I met my friend in the city and she did help me find a job at the carpet factory. Even though both of us worked in the same place she was making a lot more money than I was. I asked her how she could afford all the expensive things when I could barely make ends meet. She told me she worked in a cabin restaurant a few evenings every week where her clients would give her money in return for sex. She told me she could get me a job there too if I want.

I declined to do that, to which she said she could introduce me to one of her clients who hired manual laborers to work in a factory in India and the money would be a lot more since I would be paid in Indian currency. I met the guy and he said we would have to leave in few days and during that time he would make arrangements for all the necessary paper work. Three days later we crossed the Nepal border and while we were in the bus he got me some food and cold drink and asked to me eat and get some rest. When I woke up he was gone and I was told I was in a Delhi brothel sold for 20,000 Indian Rupees.

As discussed earlier in the section on demand and supply elements responsible for trafficking, it can be noted that in these scenarios the push factors (factors pushing individuals to action) are poverty, unemployment, oppression and gender discrimination, and likewise the pull factors (factors pulling or compelling the individuals to action) are vision of better employment and a better life.

Life in a Brothel

The letter of introduction and consent forms clearly mentioned that the women were absolutely not being asked to share any part of their experience that they are not comfortable sharing. I

wanted the women to be clear that I was privileged to hear their stories and did not want to ask them for more than they could freely share. Maya agreed, telling me before the start of the interview that she did not want to talk about the time she was in the brothel because it reminded her of all the suffering she had been through then. Still, she said,

Teti bela ko dukkha samjhida ta ajha ni aang siringa huncha mero (Even to this day I get chills to the bone whenever I think about the pain and hardships I went through while I was there).

Even though I tried to be clear that participants were not asked to share about their worst times, to my surprise, Pema chose to recall to me the time in the brothel she referred to as her “worst nightmare”.

In the beginning I used to yell and cry most of the times when they asked me to change my dress and wear makeup. I still remember the very next day after I came to the brothel they sent about six men into my room. I was raped multiple times on the same day. They would not stop even when my vagina was bleeding. Most of them were approximately above the age of forty. Besides that, some clients would ask for oral sex and when I objected they would burn my arms, neck and stomach with cigarettes.

I get really bad menstrual cramps but no one cares about it in the brothel and they used to make me serve 10-11 clients even during my periods until I fainted. There was also this one time when my left arm was broken after the ‘*gharwali*’ had beaten me a lot when I refused to take clients because of severe pain in my lower abdomen.

Also the brothel owner would never let us out of the house and I don’t even remember how many times I was stripped naked and beaten for trying to escape that

prison. I even tried to commit suicide once by hanging myself but they caught me. Each and every day when I opened my eyes there I prayed that day to be my last being alive. Throughout our conversations, I could observe the physical and mental torture these women went through while they were in the brothel. I still remember Pema holding my hands tightly a couple of times while she was recalling the traumatic experience. It is extremely difficult for me to put into words the pain and sufferings I witnessed in the eyes of these women as they were sharing a part of their life with me.

Maya's decision to not recall about the horrible past speaks volumes about the appalling situations women must go through while they are in the brothel. I could see pain in Maya's eyes and quiver in her voice when she shared how hard it is for her to forget the daily physical and mental torture she went through for seven long years. Likewise, Pema's experience also explains the sufferings they go through on an everyday basis from having to serve clients even when their bodies give up to being beaten by the brothel owners for any small mistake.

The severe physical and mental distress survivors go through at the time they are in brothel does not completely end immediately even when they are out of there.

Story of Escape/rescue

Not wanting to revive old traumatic memories, the original focus of this study was on the life of women after leaving their lives in captivity. This section explores women's journeys from rescue/escape to return in their homeland. When asked about the methods used to rescue women from brothels, all the service providers said police raids were the most effective approaches, however they also noted that brothel owners have become more cautious about the situation and that there have been several instances where police officers are bribed, stifling efforts at rescuing

women, sometimes putting the women in added danger. The service provider from WOREC Nepal added that in recent times' police have started working in coordination with local NGOs so that the rescued women can be taken to a safer environment immediately. She further added that this police and NGO coordination is not always followed because police officers are not legally obligated to inform NGOs about the raids. Apart from police raids some other methods included women escaping from the brothels themselves risking their lives. The Maiti Nepal service provider shared that sometimes after working at brothel for many years the brothel owners let women go if they agreed to bring younger girls to work in the brothel. These processes can be very complicated on a variety of levels.

Maya's exit from trafficking was not initially a liberating experience. After being sexually exploited in the brothel for about seven years, Maya was literally thrown out in the streets of Mumbai for being physically unwell.

I had had multiple abortions while at the brothel and no proper medical attention was provided. I was completely drained of energy when they threw me out. I remember the feeling when every muscle and bone in my body ached and was pretty sure I would die in the street in a day or two. I was taken to Mumbai police by a woman who saw me lying in the street. With the help of Mumbai police, I was sent back to Nepal police in about four days. In Nepal I was kept in the police station for two days until a lady from an organization came and said she would take me to a safer place. The policemen in both stations had given me a very hard time while I was there. They called me a prostitute and [said] that I deserved what I got because of my bad choices in life.

Pema on the other hand was rescued from a brothel in Delhi during a police raid and brought back home after being gone for a year and half. She was sent back to Nepal police about a week

after her rescue with the help of Delhi police. She shared a similar experience as Maya while she was at the Delhi police station.

I remember when I was at Delhi police station some of the men were making fun of me saying ‘what did men see in a *chinki* (small eyes) woman like you that they were paying money to sleep with you?’ I was scared the whole time while I was there that they might send me back to the brothel as I had seen police sending girls back to the brothel after the raid sometimes in previous cases. Next day a woman from a Delhi based organization came and took me with her saying she would help me get back to Nepal. They handed me over to Nepal police through Birgunj border in Nepal. To my surprise I was ill-treated by the policemen in my own country as well. Finally, two days later I was taken to a shelter home in Kathmandu.

The survivors’ shared experience led me to understand that survivors are often not treated well by the police authority. When asked about this, one of the service providers indicated that the problem used to be worse and shared,

The police did not realize how sensitive this matter was which was basically due to lack of awareness. The NGOs then realized in order to make the transition smooth we need to work hand in hand with the police authority which we now do. Police authorities are more aware regarding the issue now and also deal with survivors with more compassion. It would be wrong to say there is a 100 percent progress but it’s definitely more than what it used to be two years ago.

Not only is the transition across borders through the work of police and others a complicated experience, but the actual return to home territory is also not simple or totally positive.

Life Experience in Homeland after Return

In this section I will share the experience of survivors after they are rescued from the brothels. In order to do this, I have divided this section into different parts, largely based on the interviews with survivors and service providers. It was found that there was not a single usual process of bringing the women and girls back. The service providers shared that some women are rescued during police raids in brothels and then handed over to NGOs, while some manage to escape on their own, risking their lives. From the interviews with service providers it was also found that women who escape from brothels very rarely contact police or NGOs due to the fear of being publicly humiliated. Unfortunately, the service provider from Asia Foundation shared that in most cases women who return home directly are discarded from their families and in turn are exposed to being re-trafficked.

First I explain the process used to assist reintegration of the survivors and follow with survivors' experiences in the rehabilitation centre after return. I then explain the challenges they face in their day to day lives. Finally, I write about the support system available for women and the coping mechanisms that keeps them going.

Reintegration Process

Coming back to the country of origin is only a part of the battle won for the survivors. There are other factors that need to be taken care of, one of which is for them to reclaim and rebuild their lives. In Nepalese society, NGOs have been playing a crucial role in providing assistance to the survivors of sex trafficking. When asked about NGOs procedures to reintegrate the survivors, one of the service providers from Maiti Nepal explained that there is no standard procedure

because each case is different from the other; however, the service providers don't encourage survivors to go back to their community immediately after they are rescued. He shared,

I have witnessed so many young women being rejected by their families and communities after their return. They are abandoned and blamed for the situation they are in, which often makes them more vulnerable to being re-trafficked as they have no other way of supporting themselves.

The first step toward reintegration is a complete physical check-up including HIV testing. If anyone is diagnosed with severe illness they are sent to Maiti Nepal's hospices where they are provided proper medical attention, love and care. Maiti Nepal also provides professional counselling to returnees in need. Along with this, legal support is also provided which includes legal case filing, criminal identification of the traffickers, as well as a legal case hearing.

However, one of the service providers from Asia Foundation said that because of lack of provision of a hearing where the identity of the woman who has been trafficked can be hidden, the privacy of survivors is compromised the majority of the time and the survivors end up facing more difficulty.

The shelters for survivors are categorized as emergency shelters, transit shelters, short-term shelters and long-term shelters (United States Agency for International Development, 2005, pp. 2). Emergency shelters provide shelter for a few days to a month to survivors with immediate physical and/or medical needs. Likewise, transit homes are located in designated areas like borders where the police work in close coordination with NGOs and provide temporary shelter to the survivors. Similarly, short-term shelters provide a temporary roof for survivors for about three months and survivors are usually referred to them by emergency shelters. Lastly, long-term shelter homes are the ones which assist survivors to develop necessary skills, re-build confidence

in themselves and reintegrate them back to their communities (United States Agency for International Development, 2005, pp. 2).

According to the service provider from Maiti Nepal, the NGO operates three prevention homes in three different districts of Nepal where survivors are accommodated for about three to six months and also provided with income generating training while developing life skills through informal education, and knowledge of basic health care. Maiti Nepal also runs eleven transit homes, two rehabilitation centres and two hospices in different districts of Nepal.

Likewise, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal operates shelter homes in eight districts of Nepal. While the survivors are in the rehabilitation centres they are also provided skill training such as weaving, stitching, beautician work, bead work, plumbing, repair and maintenance of various goods and appliances. Meanwhile, work is going on outside the centre trying to reconstruct women's lives and reconnect them with family and community. A service provider from Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal shared,

Almost for a year or year and a half we conduct as much ground work as possible to help survivors get back to their community. We also make arrangements for parent as well as family counselling so that they are prepared and there is no victim blaming and shaming. However, there is very low success rate where the families are willing to take them back. It is even more shocking to see cases in which families are not willing to accept the returnee even if they were sent away by their parents' consent in the name of big employment opportunity. This is why in a society like ours it might be easier for a woman to get justice through law but extremely difficult to be accepted by the community.

As discussed earlier in the literature review section, it is very difficult to reintegrate survivors back into their families and communities because of the deep stigma associated with sex trafficking.

Return to Normal?

It appears that it was almost impossible for the survivors to lead a normal life after the rescue and return to their homeland. First, there is the psychological and emotional trauma to deal with. Maya described her experience of first few months.

I had a very difficult time falling asleep and even if somehow I did, I used to get nightmares where several men were trying to have sex with me at a time and there were times when I had urinated in the bed because of those recurring nightmares.

Pema shared her experience as well.

For days I would blame myself for my situation but then again I remembered I did not ask to be sold and this thought would make me so angry and at the same time helpless.

The psychosocial counsellor expressed that the first few months tend to be the most crucial time for the returnees and the new surroundings can be extremely over-whelming for them. She added,

It is very important to realize that they are extremely vulnerable at that point which is why they need to be comforted and assured they are in a safe place. I have seen cases where survivors are asked hundreds of questions right after they are rescued which makes them even more scared and anxious than they already are.

I realized that it is very hard for survivors to get back on their feet in various aspects; physically, mentally and even economically. The complexity of what survivors have been through and the society to which they return challenges this healing. Maya expressed her concern.

It would be tolerable if I had one issue to deal with...I didn't even know where to begin to pick up the scattered pieces of my life.

One element of security, an important foundation for healing, is a safe place to live. In order to prevent survivors from being further stigmatized NGOs have been trying hard to provide them better and safer homes. A service provider from WOREC Nepal shared that government also provides support but it is usually limited to small matters such as travel costs and or other miscellaneous expenses. However, with regards to the Government's Minimum Standards of Services to victims of human trafficking at shelter homes, it appeared that the NGOs were in fact working in compliance with the standards by ensuring a safe environment, and providing regular professional counselling sessions for the survivors and take necessary preventive measures against any crisis situations.

For example, both survivors lived in rehabilitation centres after their return and shared that experience to be very helpful. Maya said,

I went home straight after I returned but to my surprise my mother did not let me inside the house and asked me to go where I came from. I went back to the police station and from there I was taken to a women's shelter home. Being in the shelter made me realize my life is not over yet and I'm not alone in this. It was not just about getting food on the table three times a day...I felt comforted and most of all they were ready to help me in any possible manner.

Pema shared a similar experience saying,

Me and the other women would talk for hours about how happy our lives used to be before. It used to make us sad and usually we would end up crying but at the same time I would console myself thinking what if I was all by myself at this worst time of life.

Even beyond finding secure housing and support away from their original homes, other parts of life were not normal for the survivors immediately after return to their homeland. The participants' descriptions of their experiences returning from being trafficked revealed a number of significant themes which are categorized as; non-acceptance from family, community non-acceptance, economic challenges, social stigma, and mental health of survivors.

Family non-acceptance

Family holds a great value in Nepalese society. This is especially true for women who have been through such a rough phase; family is the first place they turn. Maya said she was surprised at her family's response when she first returned.

Before going to the shelter, I went home to my family but they did not let me in saying I was 'impure' and brought shame to the family. I cried for hours sitting outside the house but no one opened the door. Finally, my father came out with a wooden stick and started beating me until I could take no more and fell on the ground. I was so disheartened by that incident and felt I was better off dead.

A service provider from Maiti Nepal expressed his concern about the stigma that not only survivors but also their families go through which makes it even harder for survivors to go back. Pema's first challenge was her fear of rejection in going back home.

I used to hear stories from other women in the shelter about how indifferent their families were towards them after the return. For me that was the basic reason I chose not to see

my family immediately after coming back. With the help of the organization, I was scheduled to meet my parents two years after my return. I had already started to work in the border check post then. To my surprise my parents were happy to see me as they had lost hope of seeing me ever again. But they did not want me to go back to the village with them because they were scared the villagers would throw them out of the village because of me. They said there was a rumor in the village that I ran off to the city to become a prostitute and the villagers used to mock my parents time and again blaming them for my bad upbringing.

Community/society non-acceptance and discrimination

All service providers as well as survivors reported the existence of deep stigma against the returnees in society. In an attempt to comprehend whether and how the survivors were accepted by the community, I asked them about the reactions of the community people towards them, if they faced any sort of discrimination and whether they had any difficulty getting into a profession after their return. Maya recalled,

I had completely abandoned my hope of going back to my village after being rejected by my own family. I got married to a man who used to work in a sweet shop. He knew that I was sold in Mumbai before. His family did not agree to accept me and his mother even accused me of using black magic to lure her son by calling me a *boxi* (witch). The people in his village did not let me use the common tap to fetch water and wash my clothes saying I have HIV AIDS and they will get it too if I am anywhere near. These situations were creating differences between my husband, his family and the neighbours as well which gradually started to impact my married life.

By the time I had given birth to my son, my husband had started beating me and tried to throw me out of his house multiple times. One night he got home drunk, dragged me out of the bed while I was sleeping and along with all his family members tried to throw me into a water well. I somehow managed to escape from there but after that never got to see my son's face again. I had nowhere to go from there and no money either to survive. I even tried to find work at some local shops in the village but no one hired me saying I was a prostitute.

Pema shared that it is extremely difficult to lead a normal life once you have been a '*dhandewali*' (a woman who has sex with many men for money). She continued,

Inside the shelter home I was shielded but it was when I stepped outside that door I realized how much I am being judged by people. They roll their eyes, stare and I remember an incident when this woman came up to me spat on me saying what a disgrace I was for entire womanhood.

Pema now works as a part of a border surveillance team and as part of her work, many times she has gone to villages to participate in street dramas or cultural performances as a part of trafficking and HIV AIDS awareness campaigns. She shared that even though her job is very rewarding she sometimes becomes the victim of negative criticisms.

Multiple times while I am in an awareness program I overhear people saying things like, 'she is preaching to us while she herself is a prostitute'.

The issue of survivors being a disgrace for the entire community came across numerous times during the course of this study to which the service provider from WOREC Nepal added,

These women are usually from a rural part of the country where communities are not so dense due to which everyone is aware of what's happening in the neighbours' households.

She added that the majority of times survivors are treated as untouchables and sometimes it goes as far as families of survivors being cast out.

Economic aspect

During the interviews with survivors economic insecurity stood out as one of the major challenges women faced on an ongoing basis. Maya shared,

I was living in my husband's house even though I was being beaten and tortured and that was the only way I was getting food on my plate. Because I had no money with me I was compelled to tolerate all the brutality day in and day out. The worst situation of all is that I cannot even fight for my own son as I heard you need to pay a lot of money to the lawyer for that.

It is even harder for survivors to sustain their lives when they are unable to make a living for themselves. Service provider from Maiti Nepal expressed his disappointment in the way survivors are treated,

It is hard enough they have to struggle with physical and emotional suffering but not being able to get employment is utterly outrageous. One of the biggest reasons for not hiring returnees' is stigma against HIV AIDS.

It was found that apart from the stigma against HIV AIDS (assuming that the women would be challenged with these ailments) employers are reluctant to hire returnees with reasons like they cannot be trusted, customers might be hesitant to use their service if they know about their past.

At one level I realized it could be because of lack of awareness but at the next level it seems to be pure ignorance. On the other hand the economic security of a survivor can be a support for her family and this can be a challenging and complicated twist to family relationships. Pema shared,

One of the biggest reasons my parents are still in touch with me is because I support them financially. They are ashamed of my past worrying what the society might say but since I send them money regularly they have not cut me off completely and I am not complaining.

Social Stigma

Corcker et al states that “stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context” (as cited in Link, B., & Phelan, J., 2001, pp. 365). For a survivor who has just returned from an Indian brothel it is extremely humiliating to face their family and community because, as shared one of the survivors, in Nepalese society a woman’s purity is judged by her virginity.

According to the psychosocial counsellor, the major factors leading to stigmatization of trafficking survivors were people’s perception regarding HIV AIDS and/or other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and the tendency of blaming survivors for bringing shame upon their family. She further stated,

It is heart wrenching to hear the stories and actually witnessing these women being blamed for something they did not even choose to do in the first place and on top of that they are abandoned by their loved ones at the time they need them the most.

It was also found that due to lack of knowledge about HIV AIDS in most rural areas and even in some urban communities, people reject trafficking survivors saying they will spread the disease if they are anywhere close to other “healthy” people. Maya shared her experience,

It is true there is high chance of contracting HIV AIDS due to unsafe sex but people are not ready to accept that not all returnees have the disease. People think that talking with us or even shaking hands with us will transfer HIV AIDS to them, which is ridiculous. It is even worse for women who actually have HIV AIDS. Our status in the society is lower than that of a stray dog.

Mental Health of survivors

One of the most striking facts that I came across through the journey of this study was the fact that mental health of the survivors was provided the least attention. According to a study conducted by Tsutsumi, Izutsu, Poudyal, Kato and Marui (2008) on mental health of female survivors of human trafficking in Nepal, out of 44 women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation and had returned home, it was found that 43 (97.7 percent) had anxiety, 44 (100 percent) had depression and 13 (29.5 percent) had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The study further explains that apart from having mental health problems caused by the experience of being trafficked the survivors are also traumatised because of the fact that they are sold in a foreign land and are subjected to rape as well as other physical abuses (pp. 1845).

During the interview with a psychosocial counsellor she shared,

The concept of mental health and wellbeing is very new in our country. I have witnessed cases where survivors get panic attacks and/or extreme anxiety attacks in the middle of a

hearing because they have not been provided proper care and counselling. Provision of physical care only is not enough when they are not feeling like themselves from within. When asked about the needs of survivors one of the service providers from WOREC Nepal expressed the need to provide immediate attention towards the mental health of survivors.

If you had asked me couple of years ago I would have emphasized on providing them proper income generating skills so that they can become independent and be able to seek justice against the perpetrator. We still advocate for that but times have changed now. NGOs have gradually realized the importance of the mental health of survivors. Because of the extreme agony resulting from the ordeal they have survived, sometimes even after the criminal is punished or even after they have been rehabilitated the survivors have a very tough time moving on with their lives due to having recurrent thoughts of their past. Maya also shared about having to deal with mental health concerns after her return.

I used to have all these sort of mixed feelings I cannot explain what exactly. I used to get extremely anxious whenever I had to meet someone new and at the back of my mind I felt they want something in return from me or take advantage of me which used to make me feel sad and angry at the same time for being so helpless... I used to have thoughts of harming myself hoping to lighten the extreme burden I had on my head.

Pema also had an experience of dealing with mental health problems.

The physical suffering of my past was harrowing, I did not even realize I had gone into depression until long after I arrived at the shelter. I was isolating myself from everyone else and being irritable at the same time giving hard time to the people at the centre. I remember not talking to a single women even after spending weeks at the shelter.

The accounts of survivors clearly explain the agony they must go through within themselves even after being physically out of the brothel. The study by Tsutsumi et.al. (2008) suggests an extreme need for interventions to address the issues of mental health which includes educating people about human rights, adverse impacts of physical as well as mental disorders, and preventing women from being trafficked (pp. 1846)

Coping Mechanisms

It is extremely difficult for survivors to move on with their lives in the midst of all the hardships. In this study both survivors have not been completely reintegrated back in their communities and that adds to the extreme sensitivity of the matter for them, yet they continue to manage, day after day. I asked both survivors what gives them strength and courage to cope with the challenges. Maya had tears in her eyes as she recalled the “lowest point in her life” as being after her return when she was rejected by her loved ones, and how she managed.

It was very difficult for me in the beginning especially after I was abandoned by my family and husband...in fact it still is difficult but I feel like I have gathered myself together now. I try to involve myself in activities as much as possible because an empty mind is a devil’s workshop and when I occupy myself in activities I feel productive. For instance I attend meetings of survivor support groups held by the organization where I get to meet women who have been through similar experience as me. Through these groups I learned I am not alone, I have my rights to express my feelings and live.

Some survivors found that meeting with a counsellor was therapeutic, as Maya expressed:

For me talking with my counsellor works ten times better than taking pain medications. It fills so much positivity within me which I guess is the most essential aspect for

me...and it is only because I don't feel judged, I am not discriminated or blamed for everything that went wrong in my life.

Pema on the other hand expressed her parents' support to be most helpful in coping with everyday challenges.

It is unfortunate that I cannot live with my parents because they are scared the villagers might throw them out, but the fact that my parents are on good terms with me and I get to see them every week is more than enough for me to fight the rest of the world. I don't even care if they are supportive of me because I help them financially; it still is a huge strength for me. As for society's way of looking at me, it used to bother me initially a lot and it still does but now I have made peace with myself by simply avoiding and ignoring people's nasty comments about me.

She further added that her work at a border check-post is yet another factor that keeps her going stronger than ever.

Every time I save a girl from being sold through the border, it is extremely rewarding and I feel so accomplished and it gives me deep sense of relief. It helps me cope better because that's when I realize there is one less girl who will suffer all the hardships that I went through.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is a heinous crime contributing to human rights abuse of thousands of innocent lives. The ongoing human trade through the open border shared by Nepal-India and the increasing trend of demand as well as supply side helps in maintaining the viscous circle. One of the major contributing factors to sex trafficking demonstrated in this study is poverty which has

led to unsafe migration of girls in search of better future. Linked to poverty is a lack of awareness among people about sex trafficking and safe migration. Furthermore, people's patriarchal mentality of the son being an investment and a daughter a liability has also made girls the victims of fraud and deception. Some parents willingly send their daughters away with traffickers in the name of employment in the city, not knowing the 'employment' they will be forced into. In addition, some girls themselves fall directly into the trap of traffickers because of their own decision to explore more economic options outside of their village or town.

Interviews also revealed the physical and psychological torture the survivors had to endure while they were in the brothels. The impact of the suffering women go through when they are in the brothel affects them throughout their lives, sometime physically in the forms of scar, burn marks, or Sexually Transmitted disease like AIDS, and sometimes mentally in the form of depression, insomnia or anxiety.

This study found that the most common way of rescuing girls from brothels is police raids. Other times women are thrown out of the brothel when they are sick, and not so 'useful' like in the case of one of the survivors in this study. The study also found that survivors face new challenges after they are rescued from the brothel. Sometimes it starts with impersonal and even abusive behaviour of policemen towards the survivors upon rescue not only in India but even in their home country.

The study showed that women also face multiple challenges once they are back "home" from the brothel. Families of trafficking returnees are reluctant to accept them because they have brought shame to their family and communities abandon them due to deep stigma linked to HIV AIDS. The survivors further become victims of discrimination economically as they are not provided economic opportunities for being a disgrace to the entire society. All the hatred and

discrimination isolate the survivors, further affecting the women's mental health and physical wellbeing.

This chapter evidenced ways survivors themselves try to cope with everyday challenges upon their return. One important way involved keeping themselves occupied in activities that also provide them with some community. The best example of keeping oneself engaged was attending survivor support group gatherings. These support groups are facilitated by counsellors and/or team leaders from the organizations that supported their rescue. In these meetings women can talk about anything from sharing their experience, issues of sex trafficking, to their rights as women among others. Sharing and being able to express themselves to a professional counsellor also proved to be very helpful. It was also evident that economic independence assisted survivors in a positive manner to cope with the suffering. The participants also shared that sometimes avoiding and ignoring negative criticisms helped them to move on. Lastly, creating awareness among others about sex trafficking also proved to be a coping mechanism for survivors in the long run.

CHAPTER SIX

MOVING FORWARD TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW

In the previous chapter I discussed, from survivors and service providers points of view, the obstacles and challenges women go through upon their return and how they attempt to cope with the aftermath of the traumatic life experience. In this chapter I will provide an in-depth explanation of the role played by the government and NGOs in Nepal in supporting returning women who have been trafficked to become independent. I also examine survivors' and service providers' perspectives on the support and services available for women and what else needs to be done in order to strengthen the reintegration process.

Services from the Government

A document search was one of the methods used in this study to find out the provisions and services available for the survivors of sex trafficking in Nepal. While interviewing the service provider from Asia Foundation, I learnt about the two major Government documents prepared by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW): National Minimum Standard (NMS) For Victim Care and Protection 2068 (2011) and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) For Rehabilitation Centres 2068 (2011). NMS for Victim Care and Protection was introduced to provide support to the victims throughout the rescue to the reintegration process ensuring their basic human rights (Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare [MOWCSW], 2013, pp. 8). Similarly, SOP for Rehabilitation Centres was created to provide and promote better care and support to victims while following the principles of NMS and rights based approach (MOWCSW, 2013, pp. 8).

The sub-section 3 of Section 5 of NMS outlines four major tasks that all government as well as non-government bodies need to follow: rescue, bringing back to the country, care as well as protection, and reintegration. According to NMS Section 10, as soon as the National Committee learns about any stranded victims in India through government and/or non-governmental bodies, they collect the victim's information and formulate a rescue plan. The National Committee forwards the information to the Ministry of External Affairs in Nepal and this information is then transferred to the Nepalese Embassy in India who coordinates with government and nongovernment organizations in India with the rescue operation. The NMS document, Section 27, states that all the travel, food and shelter expenses incurred while bringing the victim back to Nepal will be covered by the National Committee. The document also ensures all the information about the entire process must be documented properly for future records and monitoring purposes. In order to ensure proper care and protection of the survivors, Section 6, Sub-section 2, explains the two-leveled care and protection plan for victims. The first is the primary level care services, which include primary health care, food, shelter, counselling, legal support, safety, and examination of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) as well as other infectious diseases. Secondary level care includes education, life skill trainings, income generating opportunities, and seed money.

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Rehabilitation Centres also resembles the NMS document in regards to providing services for victim protection and long-term development. The SOP outlines the principles of respecting the human rights of victims, maintaining confidentiality, no discriminatory behavior, free of charge services, access to information and safety of victims. It also states that each individual case is documented and victims have full rights to have access to their case file and know about the future plan of

rehabilitation and reintegration. Section 38 of SOP also explains that even after the victim has been reintegrated, a trusted individual is sent after a month to the victim's place to check on the situation. If the situation is better the case is closed but if not the family is recommended to seek counselling and/or mediator's help. Thus, the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act 2065 (2008) Article 14 outlines that the National Committee monitors and evaluates the rehabilitation centre's performance as per need and the District Committee does this once every six month.

NGOs and Government Supporting Survivors

Throughout the course of this study it was realized that NGOs have been a huge pillar of support for the survivors – at least for the participants of this study. Some of the major NGOs in Nepal working towards curbing trafficking are Maiti Nepal, Shakti Samuha, Saathi, Himalayan Human Rights Monitors, and Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal. These organizations have been working continuously for the wellbeing of survivors from rescue until their rehabilitation and/or reintegration.

The first priority for NGOs was to ensure a safe and healthy environment for the survivors upon return. This included the physical as well as emotional wellbeing of the survivors. As discussed earlier this included regular health check-ups as well as sessions meeting with professional counsellors for survivors in need. The importance of counselling was elaborated on by the psychosocial counsellor:

Communicating with survivors is very crucial in the early stage of their return as they are traumatized and extremely vulnerable. They do not expect big life changing suggestions from me...sometime I just sit and listen and at that moment I can tell how relieved they

feel just letting it all out...all the anger and frustrations. Patience is needed in order to build a level of trust with them and I always motivate them to make decisions for themselves rather than telling them what to do and what not to.

Maintaining privacy regarding the personal identity of survivors was also considered extremely significant as the service provider from WOREC Nepal shared,

It is very important to keep personal details of survivors confidential as they are highly vulnerable to risks. One of the major risks is the stigma associated with being a returnee as people start making assumptions and blame the victim. We have seen cases where returnees have been re-victimised because of this. Once information about them] is publicised it is very difficult for them to lead a normal life which consequently takes them back to the place they have escaped with so much difficulty in the first place.

The NGOs also worked hard to make the survivors economically independent as in the case of Nepalese society, it was found that economic independence is one of the best methods to move forward in the reintegration process. Towards this end, Anuradha Koirala, in her interview with the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) discussed different gender equality training such as training in plumbing, electrical, and gardening, which are areas different from training normally associated with women, such as knitting and weaving (Tremonti, 2013). Following training, Koirala's organization then provides job placements to the women, helping to economically empower them. Koirala stated that in a poverty stricken country like Nepal, economic empowerment makes people forget about the past and it has been proven to be helpful in reintegrating women back into their communities (Koirala round-table, 2013). A service provider from Maiti Nepal added,

Our motive is to build a solid foundation for these women so that they can stand on their own feet. Apart from life skills trainings, we also provide informal education to survivors so that they are at least able to read and write.

We also provide micro-credit loans for survivors who wish to start up with small ventures like opening a tea shop, beauty parlour, vegetable farming among others... the goal is to make them feel better about themselves and empower them.

Another support extended by NGOs is providing legal counselling and aid for survivors. The NGOs work rigorously advocating for the rights of the survivors. The service provider from WOREC Nepal shared,

Fighting in favour of these survivors is not just about putting the perpetrators behind bars but it is also about providing justice to these brave women for the ordeal they have suffered. The legal assistance also makes them aware of the rights they possess as a woman and a human being.

Another important aspect brought into the picture to ensure success of the reintegration process was the need to follow up with the survivors and community people and keep record of the progress made. NGOs do carry out risk assessments before sending the survivors back to their home areas, but it was realized that extra precautions can never be harmful. The psychosocial counsellor said,

It can be very risky to just send the survivors back to their family or their community because they might have some physical and/or mental health concern, or they might suffer from discrimination at a later stage. Due to this reason it is recommended to be extra vigilant and monitor their situation at least for six months if not a year. It is a very crucial period and they might need our support. I have seen women who have been re-

victimised after returning home due to lack of proper care...The government has added this provision to the National Minimum Standards but it is hard to put into implementation because of lack of resources among the NGOs.

Survivors and Service Providers Take on Reintegration and what is needed in Addition

The Government of Nepal's National Minimum Standard of Service for Trafficking Returnees documents the need to involve survivors throughout their reintegration planning and process. As discussed earlier, I believed it was vital to know for the purpose of this study whether or not the procedures prescribed by the government were being put into practice. The psychosocial counsellor who has been working with trafficking returnees for many years said,

The outline of National Minimum Standards is very clear and precise and we always attempt to follow the standard procedures; however at the ground level it is not always possible...planning reintegration for instance. Sometimes it is vital to realize that maybe the survivors do not want to go back [to their home communities] or maybe they have nowhere to go after they are back. I have met with survivors who have expressed feelings about not wanting to go back. This is why before involving them in your reintegration plan, the first step should be to ask them whether they want to go back and then plan accordingly.

The service provider from Asia Foundation highlighted another significant point, saying that shelter homes sometimes fall short of complying fully with government introduced policies and government; on the other hand the government is not always able to regulate, monitor and provide sufficient infrastructure to meet the needs of shelter homes. He added,

I think that a holistic framework of dealing with victims is necessary for anything substantial to be done in this cause of rehabilitating victims or survivors. Therefore, as you may easily guess, the coordination between Government and Non-government bodies is minimal, and hence although I wouldn't say that the entire policies are limited in papers but are definitely not put into implementation as per requirement.

Based on the opinions of the service provider, it is pretty clear that there is a setback from the Government's part when it comes to executing formulated policies due to lack of coordination with the non-governmental organizations.

The government wants NGOs to promote awareness of the issue of sex trafficking, in the hopes that this will help with reduction of this phenomenon. Perhaps awareness by the general public will also help reduce stigma for those who do fall victim to this practice. Since we discussed earlier the stigma attached with sex trafficking, I was curious to know whether it is because of the stigma and discrimination the survivors themselves sometimes don't want to go back. Maya, one of the survivors, responded by saying,

It definitely is a big hurdle that has kept me a step back from going to my village again. I have seen the hatred and been through that pain which is why I want to live where I am accepted and loved despite my past. I know times have changed and people are much more aware about who we really are and not just a prostitute. But I guess I have changed too and now I wish to live life in my own terms.

Awareness about sex trafficking among the general masses would make a difference to potential victims, their families, and whole communities. The need to incorporate the issue of safe migration in awareness raising programs was also considered crucial by the service providers and an area in which they are involved. The service provider from Asia Foundation said,

The conventional approach of organizing awareness raising campaigns especially in a rural setting is through street dramas, broadcasting about sex trafficking on radio, having informal group discussions, among others [is important]. This is where we need to make people understand the concept of safe migration. This will make people understand that not all forms of migration are bad and help them make the right judgement.

Pema, a survivor, who also works at the border check-post added,

I come across people who are frustrated because of the checking and inquiry at border but they need to know it is for a larger cause. If only people are more aware of this evil crime, what it has done to women like me, and what it's still doing to thousands of other women... may be they would show more compassion.

Awareness is not enough, however. The service provider from Asia Foundation also insisted that there should be regulation of the open border between Nepal and India from where it is very convenient for traffickers to execute their jobs. He added,

In order for all our prevention plans to work it is very essential to improve and monitor all the border activities strictly. For this to happen, police from India and Nepal need to work together and be extra alert towards all the border activities.

The service provider from Maiti Nepal expressed the need to focus on both awareness and economic opportunities simultaneously,

Awareness is only one side of the coin. In a country where almost half of the population live in rural settings it is extremely important for the government to make arrangement for some sort of small industry or any source of income through job opportunity for these women. It is significant to realize that awareness alone may confine the problem

temporarily but a sustainable solution is to combine both awareness programs and develop economic opportunities.

To sum up, the service provider from Asia Foundation briefly explained the Government-introduced plan and how it needs to be undertaken in order to counter trafficking and advance the rehabilitation of survivors.

I think there should be three-pronged programs to combat [sex trafficking], namely: prevention, prosecution and protection. The prevention programs are the ones which are aimed to raising awareness of human trafficking or minimizing the risks or vulnerabilities of being trafficked. Many of those who get trafficking think that they got trafficked because they relied completely on the plan of the traffickers, such as in getting fairly high income or by living an urban lifestyle or so. The awareness of trafficking is therefore very important to prevent trafficking.

In addition to prevention, there should be programs on prosecution, which mean bringing the traffickers/perpetrators under legal action. This will have two clear impacts: one is that by arresting traffickers and trying them in courts, we discover more how the trafficking crime operates, who is participating, and who is being trafficked, etc. On the other hand, it also creates a deterrent effect on the future traffickers. They will realize that trafficking is a heinous crime with a serious punishment sentences.

The protection programs are those which aim at protecting the victims/survivors from being re-trafficked again. This can be done by providing proper legal and psychosocial counselling, along with providing them with shelter and other basic needs to restart their living in their communities.

Conclusion

This chapter explored from the point of view of survivors and service providers, the support available for survivors upon their return to face challenges and start their new lives back in Nepal. The physical and mental wellbeing of survivors was found to be the first priority of NGOs and they provide extensive support such as secure housing, training in different trades, regular physical examination, proper diet and also counselling for survivors in need. The idea of mental wellbeing of returnees was found to be relatively new in Nepal and the fact is that much more research needs to be undertaken regarding it.

Economic security, a basic need, is considered crucial, as it is one of the major push factors for a successful reintegration. In a society with high rates of poverty, if there a survivor can also be a provider then families are likely to accept them, which in the case of this study was proved to be true. However, because of the stigma attached to surviving sex trafficking and fear of losing face in front of the community most families are still reluctant to completely accept the returnees. For this reason NGOs have been organizing awareness campaigns in order to inform people about the causes and consequences of sex trafficking.

The study also illustrated the need to incorporate survivors into the entire reintegration plan. Service providers were clear that survivors should be fully aware of the step by step procedures available to them, and survivors should be the ones who decide whether they want to go back to their family homes or start their life on their own. Along with this it was also noted that NGOs need to comply with government policies and likewise government needs to provide more resources and support to move the entire process forward.

Social stigma and discrimination against survivors were found to be major challenges for survivors in not wanting or fearing to go back to their home. It was also realized that some

survivors do not want to be part of their old life; one of the survivors shared not wanting to go back and instead lives life on her own terms, perhaps with more freedom and autonomy than she had before.

The study also revealed the importance of proper monitoring and evaluation of the situation of trafficking survivors once they are back to their community. This is regarded as essential to save the survivors from future danger of being re-trafficked or becoming victim of discrimination within the community. Into their agenda of prevention, prosecution, and protection, the provision of effective monitoring and follow up needs to be added for a successful reintegration which in the case of Nepal was not found to be in effect.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The previous chapters discussed factors responsible for the increase of sex trafficking in Nepal and the methods used to carry out the trade. They also shared the perspective of women who were trafficked and some service providers who continue to work with survivors and community to change the situation. The study aimed to learn the challenges and struggles women survivors of sex trafficking face after they are back in Nepal. It also focused on how these women cope with the trauma and what support is available to them. According to the findings of this study as explained in preceding chapters, women suffered from multiple hardships upon their return but an increased level of awareness regarding the issue of sex trafficking, a solid desire to be independent, and a strong determination to take charge of their lives while attempting to create a positive change in the community were also observed.

The study is framed by the theories of basic human needs tied with an empowerment approach anticipating whether social justice and human rights of the survivors are ensured in the midst of all the structural barriers against them. The use of qualitative methodology helped to provide more meaning and depth into the study by giving voice to the population of the society that has been discriminated against and treated as outcasts among their own people. The open ended structure of the interviews enabled flexibility for study participants to express and share what they wished instead of restraining their chain of thoughts. Sometimes the results were surprising as survivors courageously shared more than was asked of them.

In this section I will elaborate on the themes developed from the study. This includes the prevalence of structural violence limiting women from meeting their basic human needs. The concept of empowerment as a means of attaining those needs, as described by Burton (1990) was also significantly highlighted as a major finding of this study. However, as I dug deeper into the

concept of empowerment while talking to the women, multiple conundrums were raised surrounding the issues of human rights specifically rights of these survivors; this will be discussed later in this section. I will conclude this work with an overview of the future hopes and aspirations shared by the survivors.

Structural Violence and Unfulfilled Basic Human Needs

The prevalence of structural violence in Nepalese society was quite evident from the interviews with service providers and survivors. Patriarchy-based structural violence has been thoughtlessly adopted into Nepalese society and has normalized violence against women. Merry (2009) explains that patriarchy alone does not validate and facilitate gender violence; it is deeply rooted in the cultural understandings of gender, power structure, class, and race (p.16-17). Nepalese society has strong patriarchal values that give license to men to oppress women in the name of culture.

During the interviews with survivors, multiple instances of structural violence were shared including gender discrimination, unfulfilled basic needs and lack of financial security. Gender based discrimination in the context of this study included the trend of preferring son over daughter, dependence on and domination of male members of the family, and powerlessness on the part of women in terms of taking decisions for herself. The service provider from WOREC explained about gender based violence through an example,

Women still are treated as second-class citizens in our country and the situation is even worse in the rural parts. We frequently hear cases about women who are widows, single mothers or even trafficking returnees who live on their own being beaten or stripped naked and thrown out of the village with the allegation of being a witch. It is absolutely

inhumane and unacceptable to do that to someone just because she does not have a protective “male shield” around her.

Unfulfilled basic needs can also be categorised under structural violence because survivors need for autonomy and development have been structurally denied before they were trafficked and even after the return to their homeland. Pema, being the eldest child in the family, had sole responsibility to take care of her siblings and her father being an alcoholic was just another everyday trouble on top of all the others,

I know I left home of my free will and no one pressured me but that does not mean I chose to be sold. *“Gaas baas ra kapaas jasto adhaarbhut kura pani afno ghar ma nahuda pariwaar ko dukkha kasari hernu”* (It’s difficult to see your family in misery when you don’t even have the most basic stuff like food, clothing and shelter.)

Economic insecurity was another barrier survivors encounter with after their return. We discussed earlier about the stigma and discrimination survivors face while searching for economic opportunities. Apart from that, women are marginalized even further due to feminization of poverty in Nepal as explained by the service provider from WOREC,

In a country where even for citizenship, the most basic human right of an individual, a woman has to rely on their father or husband until very recently, it is very disappointing to see where women stand economically. In theory women can claim property rights but in practice it is rarely seen and even if a woman fights for her rights she is labelled as arrogant and disrespectful to our culture.

According to the Nepalese Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), over four million undocumented people are currently living in Nepal (Latschan, 2015). Nepal’s Citizenship Act of 2006 claimed children could inherit citizenship from their mothers; however

this remained far from being in practice until the provisional 2014 Constitution Assembly explained that in order to inherit citizenship both parents must be Nepali citizens (Shrestha, 2014). Shrestha further explains about the poor situation of single and or separated mothers who may have to go back to their abusers in order to claim citizenship of her children as they cannot inherit it from their mother. In addition, Shrestha showcases a clear picture of deeply rooted male domination in Nepal through an example where a foreign or single woman and her children can easily get Nepali citizenship when she marries a Nepali man but on the contrary if a Nepali woman marries a foreigner or is abandoned by her Nepali husband, her children remain undocumented or stateless, in other words (Shrestha, 2014).

Survivors and Human Rights

“Our rights? Why are we even talking about this?”

I realized in the course of this study that most times women who have been trafficked were compelled to take two steps back whenever they took a step forward, be it when they tried to stand on their own two feet by making choices for themselves or when they sought support from their loved ones and/or communities. As we discussed previously, survivors are often deprived of basic human needs resulting from direct and structural violence. Maya brought into light the issue of other human rights abuses and how, often, they have been completely unaddressed.

I never got a chance to go to school, always got leftover food because my little brother had to be fed first. My father never cared enough to get me a citizenship card because I am a woman and not the one to take care of them in old age...in brothel we are treated as a piece of meat for dogs and fortunately if we get to come back home we are tagged as prostitutes (wipes tears from her eyes as she continues to speak)... women in most parts

of our country are treated as objects and it's even worse for us because in the eyes of everyone we are someone who is not pure anymore...it's easy to give speeches and write on papers about women's rights and human rights but there are very few hands that come forward to encourage us when needed the most.

The failure to view human trafficking as a human rights violation of women and rather blaming victims for getting what they deserved for being an undocumented migrant (Jordan, 2002) shows a shortfall of responsibility and compassion from the government level. One of the biggest setbacks is the tendency of government and some NGOs to treat returnees as weak objects who are extremely vulnerable and need to be spoon fed (Jordan, 2002). Jordan further expresses that it is vital to understand that these women and men are much stronger with the ordeal they have suffered and thus it is crucial to acknowledge them as individuals with human rights rather than mere objects or victims. This helps to promote empowerment by supporting the affected individuals to make choices and take control of their own lives (Jordan, 2002). This connects with the experience of the women in this study who refuse to be identified as victims and pitied upon. The term survivor explains that, no matter how hard the situations, they are they are ready to pick up the scattered pieces, join them together, come out even stronger and move ahead.

Empowerment

“I can walk with my head held high”

Schwerin (1995) defined empowerment as “a personally transforming process by which people gain greater control over their lives and create alternatives to domination” (p. 71). In this study of sex trafficking survivors, empowerment was recognized as an essential ingredient for women to lead their lives forward be it through gathering the courage to fight discrimination, or through

advocating for their rights and seeking justice against the wrong doers, or through learning new skills in order to make a living. Pema shared,

I definitely feel empowered because my work has made me independent and closer to my family. It has provided me freedom to make decisions for myself. It has boosted my confidence that I can protect my two siblings and many other women like myself from getting into that puddle. I don't think there is anything more empowering than being able to make a difference in your own life as well as others.

Despite being unaccepted by her family and abandoned by her husband, Maya still feels good things will come in her life and is thankful for the new beginning. Maya did not know how to read and write when she returned from the brothel but now she can read and write Nepali very well which she proudly shared.

I love reading story books in my free time and children here in the shelter always surround me and ask me to read stories to them. I feel so happy to be able to do that for which I cannot thank enough to the organization. I feel empowered because I don't have to rely on others to draft a simple letter... I am no longer a puppet in the hands of brothel owners.

It appears that the psychosocial support provided to women also had an empowering impact on them. The psychosocial counsellor shared,

I have met survivors with so many different behavior patterns, from the ones who remain quiet to the ones who are extremely violent and one common thing I find in most cases is women feeling hopeless and worthless. Our sessions are about changing that, motivating them and making them realize they are not alone in that. It definitely does not happen overnight but in due course of time as they get comfortable, they start sharing and

brainstorming ideas sometimes. Group sessions are especially helpful at those times but it only happens at a later phase. Once they begin expressing themselves we encourage them more to address their concerns. We are always there to listen and give suggestions if they need but they make their own decisions which is a way to make them realize they are in charge of their lives.

The survivors shared that their journey to empowerment was a long one where they are still learning every day and strive to help others in need. This relates to Kieffer's four stages of grass roots empowerment which include entry stage, advancement phase, incorporation phase and commitment phase (as cited in Schwerin, 1995, p. 86). The entry stage is the one where an individual realizes a threat or risk to oneself which results in individual engaging in social and political activities, as when the survivors begin to engage with the NGO workers and even the judicial system. Likewise, in the advancement phase the individual becomes aware of the causes and interrelations of threat with different social, economic and political structures due to their association with various support groups, as shared by survivors and NGO workers alike. Similarly, in the incorporation phase the individual possesses the ability to make decisions for themselves by choosing right from the wrong. Lastly, the commitment phase involves the drive to develop skills and abilities of other individuals to empower them (as cited in Schwerin, 1995, p. 86). The survivors I interviewed continuously emphasized the point that remaining silent is the biggest setback for returnees as silence further victimises them. The moment these women choose to come out and voice their opinions takes them one step closer to being empowered.

Future Hopes

The survivors I had an opportunity to talk to during this study have led extremely difficult lives and continue to struggle. They have seen and been through so much and have to be ready to face a new challenge almost every day. Throughout this study I have realized how hard it is for them to forget the past and move on. They even said it was impossible to forget the nightmare that not only harmed them physically but also crushed their soul. I asked the survivors if they had any concerns or hopes for their future to which Maya took a long deep breath, remained silent for some time, and then said with tears in her eyes and a heavy voice,

I am worried I will never be able to see my son grow up...it scares me when I think he might not recognize me or worse if I won't recognize him if I ever get to see him...

Despite the challenge of being away from her son right now, Maya does have faith that the future has something good in stored for her.

I am in a much better place right now than I was a year ago. I now have the ability to choose right from wrong and make my own decisions... I have realized the importance of education in life now which is why I wish to become a teacher for little kids. I want to make a difference in my life as well as in others if possible and I don't think anything else is more powerful than education.

Pema on the other hand shared that becoming economically independent had empowered her and made her closer to her loved ones.

I cannot change what happened in my past but my future is definitely in my hands. I face every challenge fearlessly thinking it's a part of my journey or else life will never move ahead. Having the support of my parents and being able to help other women from this filthy business empowers me.

The survivors also expressed their desire to be able to live a dignified life without being blamed for their past and questioned about their future decisions. Maya shared,

It is difficult for a single woman to live on her own especially if she has been to a brothel before like me. It amazes me how people talk about human rights but fail to acknowledge matters like my right as a woman to get education, or to choose a profession or even my clothes gets questioned.

While talking about the survivors' hopes and concerns I realized that despite the traumatic life experience they had in the past they have this strong determination to overcome that and look for a better future. NGOs in this regard were found to be doing a commendable job on the ground from motivating the survivors to raising awareness among general people regarding the causes and consequences of human trafficking.

Conclusion

This study was carried out to better understand the experiences of women returnees who were trafficked from Nepal to India for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It has attempted to describe the challenges these women face upon return to their country and how they cope with those challenges. In addition, the study has also explored the resources and support systems available for these women to help them reintegrate in the community along with empowering them altogether.

The study identified poverty led unemployment, lack of education and awareness, patriarchal domination and gender based discrimination as fundamental factors causing sex trafficking in Nepal. Thus, it was noted that the rapid increase in demand for activities

supporting sex trafficking have further turned this monstrous act of human beings into a lucrative business opportunity for many individuals.

One of the conventional methods of rescuing the survivors as informed by the service providers included police raids in coordination with NGOs from origin and/or destination. In this study as well one of the survivors was rescued in a police raid however the other was thrown out of the brothel for being unwell.

The challenges these survivors faced upon return to their native land were non-acceptance from family, community non-acceptance, economic challenges, social stigma, and mental health issues of survivors. At one point during the course of this study I realized these survivors were struggling even more not just because of the challenges mentioned above but because of community's perception of labelling them as victims who are fragile and unable to take care of themselves. In this regard the study sheds light on the aspect that sex trafficking needs to be understood as human rights violation of survivors. According to the conversation with survivors it was realized instead of treating them like a burden to the society these women need to be treated with more respect and dignity.

With regards to reintegration of survivors back into their community, it was found that plans and policies have been drafted at government level however due to lack of implementation and in some cases lack of government's ability to follow up with the survivors after sending them home has led to problem of survivors being more vulnerable. In spite of these challenges, NGOs have been working extremely hard to work hand in hand with government to make the transition an empowering experience for the survivors.

The major themes developed from the life experiences of these survivors were the extreme need to address structural violence in Nepalese society and unfulfilled basic human

needs, the issue of human rights abuse of survivors, and the importance of empowerment of women for uplifting their morale. Jeong (2000) believes that the social structure that breeds inequality and violence can never conquer poverty and underdevelopment (p. 83). He further argues that while attempting to amend power relations, women redefine their roles against the ones who dominate them and raise consciousness of their identity. This study has identified that the survivors of sex trafficking must continuously fight for their rights and dignity. Economic independence and increased level of awareness of the societal issues have assisted to empower these women throughout their journey of struggle.

Final Words and Future Research

My journey in the pursuit of this study has provided me a life changing experience as I had an opportunity to have multiple conversations with these brave women. As I was writing this thesis going back and forth on the transcripts, it felt like I was having a conversation with the women at that very moment and could picture the exact same location we met. Currently, when Nepal is going through an extremely difficult phase after the earthquake of April 25/2015 and May 12/2015, I cannot help but think about the women I met, uncertain about their whereabouts.

Sharing their experience of the ups and downs in their lives post their return provided a clear picture of what is actually happening at the grassroots and what more needs to be done in order for these women to be empowered. One aspect I was particularly careful about throughout this study was to honour and respect the experiences shared by the women. The methodology of the study including the way the findings were shared proved to be extremely helpful because it importantly highlighted their voices throughout. The survivors stated that the most helpful part for them was the ability to express themselves knowing they are not being judged and can trust

the person they are sharing their life experience with. Perhaps sharing their stories was part of their empowerment, as they continue to educate others through their words.

Throughout the study the aspect of empowerment and self-autonomy as an ingredient to move forward was put forward by the survivors multiple times. This is reflected by the individuals' ability to exercise basic human rights which includes equal opportunities for education, social, economic and political development, and to have the power to make their own choices. The survivors in this study made it clear that in order to challenge the long ongoing discriminatory practices and social inequalities, it is crucial to be inclusive of variety of voices, especially those who have limited power and authority.

One of the areas that should be looked at for future research is the need to incorporate the male population into the study. Service providers explained about the increasing trend of males being trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation in different parts of the world. It is high time to understand that human trafficking is not just a woman oriented problem but is a global issue which affects men as well. Thus, in order to tackle the issue of trafficking from the roots it is significant to know about it from all dimensions.

For future research purposes, due to the sensitivity of the issue, it is important to note that these studies should be conducted by individuals who have prior direct experience and/or training working with survivors. Also, in the future, ideally I would like to go into more depths by incorporating experiences of women from other regions of Nepal. Some might call the size of this study a limitation but I prefer to not choose this word as I intend to value as well as validate the experiences and contributions of the brave survivors I interviewed.

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Appendix A

In-depth interview guide (Survivors)

1. Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview.
2. Interviewee information: Name and age (if they are comfortable disclosing)
3. How did you get free of the trafficking process?
 - a. Who rescued you and how?
 - b. How long was the rescue process?
 - c. What was the feeling like after being rescued?
 - d. How was your initial state (Physical, emotional and psychological) at the time of return??
 - e. What was your experience in shelter like?
4. What are the challenges you have faced since your return?
 - a. How was the reaction from your family/community after your return?
 - b. Did you face any sort of discrimination? If yes, what was your experience?
 - c. What kind of trouble did you have to go through in terms of choosing a profession after your return?(if any)
5. How do you cope with everyday challenges?
 - a. What kind of support system is available in the shelter home/rescue centre? Are they helpful? If yes, in what way?
 - b. What other resources do you have? What else might you need?
 - c. How are their needs being met now?
6. What have you thought about the future?
 - a. What are your hopes and dreams?

7. What keeps you going through the toughest times?

Appendix B

Interview with Service providers

1. Introduce myself and purpose of study.
2. Interviewee information: Name, age, organization they are affiliated with
3. What are the fundamental causes of trafficking in Nepal?
 - How old are the survivors when they are trafficked?
4. What is the role of NGOs in bringing the survivors back?
 - How long does it usually take?
 - What legal procedures are involved, if any?
 - How was their initial state (Physical, emotional and psychological) at the time of return?
5. How do you see the women's experiences and how their needs are met?
6. What challenges do they face in the process of reintegration?
7. What are some of the resources available to the survivors?
 - What are the programs undertaken specifically for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees? How successful these programs have been so far?
 - How do they help them cope with social non-acceptance and discrimination?
 - What kind of legal support is available for the survivors and how accessible is it?
8. What kind of programs are needed to combat trafficking?
 - What might they like to do differently if they had more resources?