

Trafficking of Bangladeshi Young Women to India: NGO Response and Government Measures to Protect Youth

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Trafficking in Bangladesh is one of the major concerns accelerating violence against girls and women silently. This article depicts the overall situation of trafficking in Bangladesh with a focus to the initiatives taken by government and NGOs to prevent trafficking. Victims of trafficking get trafficked due to various factors and face severe psychological and physical abuse during their stay in brothel. This form of violence continues even after their rescue from brothel or reintegration in family or society. Trafficked victims lose their youth due to their involvement in prostitution. It is very difficult for them to come back to normal life. Government of Bangladesh and NGOs are focusing on prevention of trafficking which is very important to protect women and children. They should focus on this problem so that all the people get a safe, secured and growing youth. Without focusing on this group of women, development of a nation is difficult. Government and NGOs should expand their activities to follow up all the survivors' situation to ensure a favorable environment for the reintegration.

Keywords: Government and NGO, Push and pull factors, Reintegration, Trafficking

INTRODUCTION

Trafficking in Bangladesh is one of the major concerns accelerating violence against girls and women silently. Women and girl children are mostly trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced prostitution. However, adolescent girls are one of the key target groups who are always in demand as they are young, innocent and unaware (Shamim, 2001). The growing need of young girls in sex industry also influenced the increased rate of trafficking from Bangladesh to India or other countries. Following the UN definition, Bangladesh in the present NPA 2012 (National Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking) presents the following definition of human trafficking given by *The Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Ordinance 2011* as:

“the selling, buying, recruitment, receipt, transportation, transfer, or harbouring of any person for the purpose of sexual-exploitation, labour-exploitation or any other form of exploitation whether in or outside of Bangladesh by means of (a) threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or (b) abduction, fraud or deception, or of the abuse of any person’s socio-economic, environmental or other types of vulnerability, or (c) of the giving or receiving of payments or

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benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person” (NPA, 2012: 7).¹

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries for trafficking today due to its large population, chronic poverty among large groups of people, ongoing natural disasters like cyclones, tornado, river erosion, drought, flood and lack of a shelter in disaster periods. Moreover, unemployment, rural-urban migration in search of work, and natural disasters increase violence against women including the risk of being trafficked (Sarker and Panday, 2006). Bangladesh has a 4,222 kilometers long border with India covering 28 districts of Bangladesh. India is the main recipient country that receives trafficked women through 20 transit points of Bangladesh Indian border (Sharmin, 2001). To understand trafficking in Bangladesh, we have to look at it both from the historical and geographical perspectives. In 1947, Indian subcontinent got the independence from British colonization and was divided in two countries named India and Pakistan. Pakistan had two regions namely East Pakistan and West Pakistan and these were geographically located 1200 miles far away from each other. At that time, Muslim families from India migrated to Pakistan and Hindus from Pakistan moved to India. From that period, there are many enclaves found in border between India and Bangladesh and India and Pakistan. These enclaves are small piece of land belonging to a nation other than that which surrounds them. There are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 enclaves of Bangladesh in India. Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) in their report shows that these enclaves are used to collect the survivors and they are trafficked through these enclaves easily by the traffickers (Gazi *et al.*, 2001). Traffickers use three forms of routes such as land, air and water for trafficking (BNWLA, 1997). Western border districts of Bangladesh, particularly Jessore and Khulna are widely used by traffickers. The main trafficking route is Dhaka-Mumbai-Karachi-Dubai. Many of the victims end up in Middle East nations (Faruque, 1998). Bangladesh is thus largely a source country as far as trafficking is concerned, from which women, men and children are trafficked into different sites of employment in the destination countries. Studies found that promise of better job by traffickers, promise of marriage worked to increase the number of trafficking in Bangladesh (Sanghera, 1999; Hossain and Al Faruque, 2007; INCIDIN Bangladesh and ILO, 2002; Gazi *et al.*, 2001). Trafficking has various impacts on young women’s lives. They face severe psychological and physical abuse during their stay in brothel and it continues even after their rescue from brothel or reintegration in family or society (INCIDIN Bangladesh and ILO, 2002). For this reason, government of Bangladesh is trying to protect young women from being trafficked. With the government, some NGOs are also campaigning against trafficking, advocating laws and promoting the reintegration program in Bangladesh.

¹An unofficial translation of s. 3(1) of the Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Ordinance 2011. This definition is in line with the definition of human trafficking provided in the most significant international treaty on human trafficking, the UN Anti-Trafficking Protocol 2000 (art 3).

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the secondary sources of information. I have written a M. Phil thesis on trafficking issue and this article provides the very basic information about trafficking. Bangladesh government and NGOs have started to work about this issue that I wanted to find out their progress and programs so far taken to rescue and reintegrate trafficking victims. This article does not depict any field experience, only describes the information used from books, articles, journals and websites.

Global scenario of trafficking

Trafficking is a form of violence that is a global security concern now. This section depicts the context of trafficking from global, Asian and Bangladesh perspective. Numbers of trafficked people vary from region to region, and as will be shown, numbers are highly unreliable. The United States State Department (2006) data has shown that 600,000 to 820,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Of the total amount, approximately, 80 percent are women and girls and up to 50 percent of them are children. United States Trafficking in Persons Report (2007) states that human trafficking is now the second largest illicit money making business in the world after trafficking of weapons and drugs. In 2006, it was ranked as the third largest business of illicit money making (United States Department of State, 2008). These are mostly women and also children of countries that are going through economic transition to market economy (Truong, 1999). A relatively recent study of the International Labor Organization shows that 43 percent of all victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation, another 32 percent are victims of economic exploitation, and the rest remains undetermined (ILO, 2005). Various global conventions have pointed out the term of women's trafficking. For instance, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), UN conference on trafficking in human beings (Chaulagai, 2009).

In Asia, estimates show that around 30 million women and children have been victimized by trafficking and exploited sexually over the last 30 years (Association of women's rights in development, 2002). South Asia has been experiencing a vast number of women and girls being trafficked for prostitution (UNDP, 2002). Huda (2006) explained the effect of tsunami that hit South East Asia, South Asia, and East Africa on December 26, 2004. It killed more than 160,000 people, and affected over 5,000,000 people severely and made 35,000 children orphan. These orphaned children together with hundreds of thousand affected women and girls are at high risk of being trafficked for prostitution or other forms of exploitation due to their vulnerability. Paul and Hasnath (2000) in their study stated that New Delhi and Karachi have become major South Asian centers for the international buying and selling of trafficked women as slaves, maids, wives or prostitutes.

In a study of Huda on sex trafficking in South Asia, she mentions that women and children from rural areas are trafficked to urban cities to get them involved in commercial

prostitution and domestic work (IOM, 2004 in Huda, 2006). He also claims that at least 20,000 Bangladeshi women and girls are trafficked to India, Pakistan and other Middle Eastern countries. Different government reports of Bangladesh also show a big amount of women are getting trafficked each year. Bangladesh country report (2007) showed an estimation of 50,000 Bangladeshi girls who are trafficked to or through India due to having border. However, these reports hardly can show the actual number of women trafficked abroad and these missing women are never counted. The issue of trafficking is gaining a lot of attention in Bangladesh due to global campaign to violence against women. The study of the Center for Women and Children Studies (CWCS) showed the increase in number of trafficking. Until 1990s the ratio number of trafficked children was only 37, while by 1997 the number reached at 927 (Shamim, 2001). In most cases, the survivors rescued from Indian brothel were trafficked during their adolescent ages. People believe that having sex with young girls would protect them from HIV/AIDS. This perception also influences the trafficking of girls and their forced involvement in prostitution (Gazi *et al.*, 2001). However, the documentation of trafficking is very poor and cannot be fully relied upon due to its divergence. The law regarding trafficking is good enough but the implementation is very unsatisfactory and this is another cause that helps to increase trafficking of girls and women.

Purpose and factors influence trafficking

There are two groups of factors influence trafficking. One is ‘push factor’ means the conditions that creates pressure on people to get trafficked. Another is ‘pull factor’ and it actually simplify the demand of trafficked people. Push factors are known as ‘poverty, low per capita income, lack of employment, lack of education, lack of awareness, family structure, easy divorce, dream of better living, large family size, over population, inadequate, insufficient and corrupted law enforcement authority’ (BNWLA, UNICEF, 1997: 10). Among the causes, poverty is an important factor behind trafficking as it plays a severe role to urban migrations of women that result in trafficking sometimes. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2005 data, in Bangladesh about 27 million people (19.5 percent of the total population) live in extreme poverty, while 31 percent of rural population suffer from chronic poverty. As has been shown in several studies, the traffickers look for the vulnerable women in villages and cities and create an environment of trust. They offer lucrative jobs in neighboring countries like India and Pakistan and convince the parents also (Gazi *et al.*, 2001).

Women from poor families try to reduce the economic burden of their family and migrate to cities to support the family but may get trapped in international prostitution. Trafficking in women for purposes of prostitution is a common example which follows the trend of sexual exploitation through objectification and commodification of women in the global capitalist world. Bangladesh has been marked by its role as “sending” country or country of origin. Traffickers lure the women and girl for a better life abroad and manipulate them for migration (Esquibel, 2005) and poor women get into the trap of trafficking by agents who are involved in facilitating trafficking. Women and girls are lured with a false

promise of well paid jobs or marriage and are trafficked into prostitution. Shamim (2010) mentioned two patterns of trafficking in her study. The first pattern is called “two step” pattern that targets the women already involved in prostitution to be trafficked abroad, for example, sex workers from local brothel or street sex workers. The second pattern is the quite dangerous “one step” pattern that targets the women or girls from village homes to be trafficked for prostitution abroad. Girls or women who are mostly virgin or sexually not active are targeted from the villages to be sold in abroad. The one step pattern is more prevalent and popular among the customers as these girls have not been infected by HIV/AIDS. Moreover, one step pattern girls can attract the customers more as customers always look for ‘fresh bodies’ (UNDP, 2002).

On other instances, the literature shows that some are cheated brutally by the false promise of marriage which destroys the girl’s will power totally and cause even more intensive psychological trauma. Traffickers act like a promising lover and get married also with the girls. Parents also do not delay to accept the offer of marriage if there is any promise of payment (Hussain, 2000). Due to dowry system which means providing money, furniture or valuable things to the groom in daughter’s marriage, poor parents prefer to accept any proposal and arrange marriage without any cross checking about groom. Because of this problem, parents arrange marriage with older men with small amount of dowry or no dowry at all. In such cases, parents do not investigate properly about groom and his family (Gazi *et al.*, 2001).

The growing demand, worldwide, for trafficked women and children for sex tourism, cheap sweatshop labour, and domestic work is also one of the reasons for rise in the trafficking. Prostitution is legal or tolerated in many countries, and widespread in most of the countries. Studies found that promise of better job by traffickers, promise of marriage worked to increase the number of trafficking in Bangladesh (Sanghera, 1999; Hossain and Al Faruque, 2007; INCIDIN Bangladesh and ILO, 2002; Gazi *et al.*, 2001). Weak administration and poor law enforcement with corruption accelerate the number of trafficking incidents. Rescue of the trafficked victims has its limitations and unacceptability, largely due to the attitude and violent behavior of the law-enforcing agencies (Gazi *et al.*, 2001, Shamim, 2001). Police is involved in trafficking in women also and though they rescue women, it is hardly known what happened to them. Most are unable to go back to their home because of a whole series of problems, and when they are released, they are again at risk of being picked up by the traffickers. Of particular interest to me is to find out the status of survivors reintegration and to understand the process of reintegration of trafficked returnees in own family and community. Moreover, natural disasters like cyclone, flood, river erosion, drought and earthquake increase poverty and homelessness. This factor can influence the trafficking of women and children.

Life of victims after trafficking

Sanghera (1999) showed the reasons that women and girls are trafficked through deception, false promise of job and marriage while some are kidnapped or abducted also. Nair (2004) mentioned that when the Bangladeshi girls are trafficked to India, they are first

kept in West Bengal and Orissa. This study finding is similar to my findings as all the survivors were taken in West Bengal (Calcutta) first. Then they are distributed in other parts of India or outside of India. All the survivors have gone through extreme physical and psychological violence when they were living in brothel. Huda (2006) mentioned that trafficked women are more vulnerable to physical health impacts as they hardly can reach proper medication when they are ill due to lack of freedom, indebtedness, poverty and inability to speak foreign language.

INCIDIN Bangladesh and ILO study (2002) reveals the psychological distress of trafficked victim due to their involvement in prostitution. Their changed identity from a good girl to a sex prostitute shattered their life and youth. These girls and women were psychologically and emotionally broken. The adolescent victims grew up in brothel, had lots of customers in a day, were physically tortured, lacked freedom and had no right to live a normal life. It is so unfortunate that trafficked girls lose their youth and can hardly come back to normal life. (Heatherton *et al.*, 2000) mentions about the changed identity of trafficked victims. It can be connected with Chaulagai's (2009) study where he also mentions about the loss of identity. When the victims were rescued from brothel and taken to police station, they were recognized as prostitutes. It was another shock for them; however, they possessed no self-esteem due to their involvement in prostitution. It was responsible to create a feeling of shame and they lost their identity. Stigma is associated with the survivors of trafficking (Crawford and Kaufman, 2008; Gazi *et al.*, 2001). They cannot accept their experience as sex workers and they go through the mixed emotion of guilt, distrust, shame and fear. They understand that no one will accept them and they have done severe sin. This feeling creates the sense of self stigma among the survivors (Paoli and Scambler, 2008). Trafficking has a major impact on health and socio-economic life of a trafficked girl. Violence is very closely connected to prostitution. In a study of Nepalese women trafficked for prostitution in India's brothels, Human Rights Watch/Asia documents that "*most girls and women start out in these cheap brothels where they are 'broken in' through a process of rapes and beatings*" (Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1995: 34). The very common forms of health impacts are anxiety, insomnia, depression, traumatic stress or disorder. These things destroy their will power and motivation to accept the past. They also lack self confidence and self power to live a normal life. Moreover, sex workers get easily infected by disease due to their unhealthy living places. Sex workers living in brothels are tortured physically and psychologically and it damages their reproductive organs and raises the risk of other communicable diseases (TIP, 2004). Crawford and Kaufman (2008) found that this damage hampers women's sexual and reproductive health, mental health, social well-being, economic-related well-being. When they are rescued and sent back to Bangladesh, they are stigmatized by the mainstream society and their return is not appreciated by community people (Shamim and Kabir, 1997). Chen and Marcovici (2003) mention that the trafficked survivors are continued to be stigmatized even after their reintegration in the society. In Bangladesh also trafficked survivors are not accepted very often. These women go through social exclusion, economic problems, and health problems. It is not easy for them to resettle their life and be a part of

the mainstream society. In many cases, these young women may be the victim of re-trafficking and they might be gone missing forever (Gazi, 2001).

NGO response to trafficking

Bangladeshi NGOs play an important role to combat trafficking and perform responsible anti-trafficking activities all over the country. There are many NGOs in Bangladesh working against trafficking and among them BNWLA (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association), DAM (Dhaka Ahsania Mission), CWCS (Center for Women and Children Studies), RJ (Rights Jessore), UDDIPAN, SAVIOUR are the leading NGOs (Bangladesh Country Report, 2011). They help to make people aware of trafficking, help to rescue the survivors and facilitate the retuning of survivors in Bangladesh. Then they are sent to the shelter homes and it provides physical and psychological health services. Moreover, they provide personality skill development training to these survivors to process their reintegration in family and society.

The government of Bangladesh, especially the Ministry of Home Affairs has cooperation with NGOs that helps to make the anti-trafficking activities more effective. BNWLA has been working as the pioneer organization in Bangladesh to combat trafficking against women and children. It also helped to make this the study possible and reach the informants quickly. This organization provides the survivors with legal assistance, shelter support, capacity building of survivors, repatriation, rehabilitation, psychological support, and conducts various researches on trafficking (Shamim, 2010). BNWLA repatriated 378 survivors from different states of South Asian countries and among them 144 were female and 234 were male survivors (Ali ed., 2007). In 2011, BNWLA rescued 119 survivors and reintegrated 102 survivors. 25 survivors got the job or livelihood support from BNWLA in 2011 (Bangladesh Country Report, 2011). Moreover, they have organized many workshops to create a platform for the collaboration between government and NGOs to improve prosecution system.

CWCS is an organization that conducts various researches and promotes advocacy to combat trafficking against women. It has urged for changes in the policy to change the existing laws and government interventions. It also gives emphasis on health care services through medical treatments. It has set up health booth to provide free health services among the survivors of trafficking and many survivors' have received free health care services and medicine. It has established a specialized hotline system for trafficked and sexually exploited victims and 2200 calls have been received by four hotline mobile phones. CWCS has managed to employ 48 survivors in different garment factories for their economic well-being of survivors. Moreover, it has selected 80 youth volunteers for motivational training to involve them in the campaign of safe migration and combating human trafficking in 160 schools in Chapai Nawabganj, Cox's Bazar, Jessore and Satkhira districts (Bangladesh Country Report, 2011).

Bangladesh Country Report (2011) describes that DAM (Dhaka Ahsania Mission) has been working to prevent trafficking in women and children. DAM has the biggest

shelter home for trafficked survivors. They started their shelter home services in 1998. Trafficking victims and other victims of violence are given shelter and provided psychological counseling to develop mentally and skill development training to achieve empowerment and facilitate the process of rehabilitation. Survivors also get education and vocational trainings in the shelter home. Moreover, it creates awareness among community people through networking with local NGOs and arranging workshops, drama shows, and school orientations on issues of violence against women and trafficking.

Bangladesh Country Report (2011) also mentions about another NGO named Khan Foundation has also been working to prevent trafficking and protect the human rights of women and children. They have organized 38 awareness raising campaigns and distributed many posters, leaflet and stickers to make people aware of trafficking. Rights Jessore is another NGO which has been working against trafficking through organizing workshops, community mobilization meetings, school student orientation, and folk song. They also arrange door to door awareness campaign, stage drama, and dialogue with local administration. Moreover, they have rescued many survivors, reintegrated 46 survivors in family. They provide economic support to survivors by distributing money. Rights Jessore also works to provide legal assistance to survivors, arrange meeting with judges, lawyers and orient lawyers to sensitize them to ensure friendly prosecution process.

In addition, international NGOs (INGOs) also have been working to raise awareness among people and promote anti-trafficking activities all over the country. IOM (International Organization for Migration), UNICEF (United Nations Children Fund), and Winrock International have been working with government to prevent trafficking and to provide assistance to the survivors of trafficking. They also arrange workshops to aware people and help the survivors to get justice legally. They want to reintegrate survivors in family and society and for this they shelter the survivor and build their capacity to get reintegrated in family.

National and legal measures to combat trafficking in Bangladesh

Bangladesh government has taken lots of measures to combat trafficking. It has adopted different plans with the help of NGOs to promote anti-trafficking programs. In the Country Report (2007), it is mentioned that the Government of Bangladesh has ratified the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in the early 1990s that outlines the right of children and ensures the legal measures against traffickers. The government has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to protect women from violence and it also includes the violence occurred against the women in the trafficking process. Bangladesh Government has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography also that ensures the legal measures against the perpetrators. To combat trafficking in women and children, Bangladesh signed and ratified the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution in January,

2012. The convention was prepared to prevent trafficking from the South Asian countries as these countries were mostly serving as the source countries.

Bangladesh government has developed an action plan based on three mechanisms – a. prevention, b. protection, and c. prosecution. Under the prevention program one has set out to form a National Anti-Trafficking Committee. It has been formed by the government level specifically by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Prevention program also suggests for a GO-NGO National Co-ordination Committee for Trafficking in Women and Children where the government will work as the representative in the anti-trafficking programs to combat trafficking and NGOs will provide assistance to the government.

The second mechanism- ‘protection’ describes the measures to be taken to rescue and recover trafficked persons. It also addresses the process of rehabilitation/reintegration of rescued and recovered persons with the help of NGOs. Moreover, the measures for the repatriation and recovery of trafficked persons have been clearly outlined. The final mechanism ‘prosecution’ entails the legal reformations taken by the Bangladeshi government to ensure women and children rights such as Constitutional provisions, the Penal Code with Amendments to Section 366A and 366B in 2001, the Children’s Act, 1974 and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000. Trafficking in women is a punishable offence in the Penal Code of 1860 and is addressed by the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933, The Children’s Act of 1974 and the more recent Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 (amended in 2003) (Bangladesh CEDAW Report, 1997). These acts contain the penalties for trafficking in women and children with a provision for death sentence or life imprisonment. Prostitution is considered as the violation of women’s human rights equal to slavery². Das (2001) mentioned that according to article 34 (1) of Bangladesh’s constitution, “all forms of forced labor are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law”. Moreover, a Police Monitoring Cell was established at the Police Headquarters in 2004. It works to collect information about trafficking, takes legal action and also helps to prosecute the cases. They also work to ensure the security of survivors after reintegration. The government has also strengthened the law enforcing bodies to give traffickers proper punishment.

In addition, Bangladesh has adopted five vital mechanisms with other South Asian countries in 2004 to combat trafficking and these are - conducting better research, reinforcing protection measures through the adoption of National Action Plans, developing compatible databases of abused, exploited and trafficked children, working with NGO, UN and multilateral partners, developing indicators of impact and effectiveness, and working with children and young people to ensure their insights in policy formation and actions (Huda, 2006: 379-380).

²Article 1 (1) of the Slavery Convention, 1926 (as amended by 1953 protocol).

CONCLUSION

This study explains the role of government and NGOs that would help to protect women from being trafficked. Generally the development programmes all over the country stress on either prevention or reduction in numbers of trafficking and rescuing trafficked women. Research is carried out to measure the impact of trafficking on prostitution and HIV/AIDS infection. Unfortunately, it cannot impact on trafficking problem effectively and lots of women of Bangladesh are heading to shattered youth and broken future. However, NGOs have started working to reintegrate women survivors in family and society and they have initiated many intervention programs (Bangladesh Country Report, 2011). Saleebey (2006) emphasizes the need of motivating individuals for self empowerment that helps to form a hope for the future. Government and NGOs should be more careful to focus on the reduction of self stigma and provide them assistance to develop capacities to start a new life. They should focus on this problem so that all the people get a safe, secured and growing youth. Without focusing on this group of women, development of a nation is difficult. Government and NGOs should expand their activities to follow up all the survivors' situation to ensure a favorable environment for the reintegration.

This study concludes summarizing the following recommendation essential for reducing trafficking and the proving life again to the trafficked returnees in the following way:

- There should be awareness raising programs to have clear idea of trafficking and increase people's consciousness about the impact of trafficking.
- Trafficked survivors should be given various facilities in cash and kind at a broader level to recover from past memories and think positively about their reintegration.
- Formation of more voluntary groups is needed to reach all community people to get aware of trafficking and change their mind. It will help to reduce the stigma and ease the process of reintegration.
- It is important to provide the survivors long term income generating opportunities and follow up to see whether the capital given to survivors is used properly or not.
- Government should collaborate with NGOs and donor agencies to strengthen trafficking prevention policy and arrange reintegration programs and also advocate the rights of survivors in every spheres of life.

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