

Trafficking of girls from Andhra Pradesh: a curse and crime

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Introduction

Feminization of poverty in the rural hinterlands and the absence of social supports and security, lead to women and children being lured and seduced to take to 'jobs' in the entertainment sector, often seemingly on a voluntary basis.

The phenomenon of human trafficking, especially women and children for the purpose of their sexual exploitation can only be tackled if there is an all round and coordinated effort on the part of the State, civil society organizations and citizens in general. The seriousness of the issue needs to be highlighted among all sections of civil society and the State. There has to a zero tolerance approach to the issue of trafficking and proactive measures needed to be taken to rescue and rehabilitate trafficked victims? Trafficking has to be viewed as a curse and crime that enslaves vulnerable sections of society to a demeaning practice, which should have no place in a civilized society. Lastly, only when we create effective mechanisms to support those already into the flesh trade to come out of it, can we speak of prostitution as a choice that some women take to in order to earn a livelihood. Negative choice can never be passed off as a choice people make to fend for themselves.

Methods:

The paper is based on Content analysis of various reports over a period of last two years in Andhra Pradesh. This paper focuses on the magnitude and dimensions of Migration and trafficking of women and children in India, for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. It highlights the illegal nature of migration and trafficking industry.

Girl trafficking assumes alarming proportions reports Vikram Sharma in Hindu from Hyderabad, March 14, 2010.

A study on sex workers in India has revealed that Andhra Pradesh is on the top in supplying girls/women to other parts of the country. The study reveals that the State contributes 14.73 per cent of sex workers who operate in more than 12 states/territories across the country. West Bengal is in the second position with 11.32 per cent. Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal together contribute a shocking 26.05 per cent of sex workers to other states.

What is disturbing further is the input coming from the central agencies that there are organised gangs operating in Andhra Pradesh who are supplying girls to other states. The State Crime Investigation Department (CID) has been directed to identify such gangs and trace them. Sources say that CID has also been asked to keep a watch on certain NGOs who claim to be working for the rehabilitation of sex workers. "It is a matter of serious concern for us. Most of the girls/women supplied to other parts of the country hail from the coastal Andhra region. We also have certain inputs which suggest that some organised gangs are operating here," the CID officials say. Sources say that 75 per cent of the girls are trafficked, while others come in contact with some sex workers and join the trade.

The study shows that 27.41 per cent of family members of the girl/woman force her into the trade, while known persons constitute 18.40 per cent. Strangers inducting them into the trade stand at 9.31 per cent while there are 43 per cent of the girls who opt for it. At least 5 per cent of sex workers, working in metro cities, come from other countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. According to Sunita Krishnan, who runs an NGO, Prajwala, 85 per cent of sex workers operating in Goa are from the State while 38 per cent of them, working in Mumbai, are from the State. "Trafficking of male children is also on the rise," she says. All these factors were discussed at a recent meeting in Delhi in which police officials from various states, including Andhra Pradesh, officials from the Ministry of External Affairs and women and child welfare departments participated.

In another study at Anantpur, Vindya And Dev described Socio-demographic profile of the trafficked women who had been trafficked – their current age, caste, religion, marital status, and children but there was no information available on the age of the women when they had been trafficked, and although this is a vital piece of information that is missing, the present age particulars also are revealing. A majority of them are in the 18-24 age group, pointing to the high-risk nature of this group, but what is also distressing is that 7 of them are still under 18 years of age indicating that they were all minors when they had been trafficked. The caste composition of the women reveals that 72 per cent of the women together belonged principally to the Backward Castes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, indicating the sources of vulnerability once again. Although the Hindus among the respondents were the majority, 13 of them were Muslim (about 17 per cent). Regarding the marital status of the women, a majority of them were either from the ‘unmarried’ category or had been abandoned/separated or widowed. It is this category of women whose economic need and vulnerability seems to have been exploited by the traffickers.(Vindya and Dev2010).Further, the conclude, “The findings underline the role of poverty in sex trafficking, with a majority of them reporting being lured and deceived by traffickers through promises of economic opportunity and work. The predisposing factor of poverty has been highlighted in previous literature; the present study only further buttresses this known fact and is one more additional pointer to the urgency of policy interventions for poverty reduction. However, poverty reduction alone as a one-stop solution may be fairly simplistic since the interaction between poverty and gendered vulnerabilities is the key precipitating factor in this context. The case studies reveal how gender-based mistreatment including denial or curtailment of formal educational opportunities, many girl children in the family, child marriage, and desertion/abandonment of husband served as proximal events related to the trafficking experience – both in the natal as well as in the marital family.

It is critical that policy interventions take note of the institutionalized cultural practices and norms of the family that place young girls increasingly at risk for trafficking. It may be relevant here to cite a few findings from an earlier research

project that the first author jointly conducted with the International Center of Research on Women in three other districts of AP, one of which was Chittoor district that is located in the same drought-prone region of Rayalaseema as Anantapur district is. For instance, it was found in interviews with current sex workers in these three districts that although a majority of them were initiated into sex work locally, that is, in their own villages or towns, the trend points to the more-preferred younger girls (less than 18 years) being sent to distant cities, (making it perhaps more difficult for them to escape and return), and also that this trend was more noticeable in the case of Chittoor district in comparison to the other two districts (International Center of Research on Women and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2010).

Trafficking: A Crime and Curse

By Dream of working in a Telugu movie, wearing branded clothes and couture spends in high street. This is what the young girls from rural Andhra Pradesh are being enticed with to ensure that ‘trafficking for labour’ goes on uninterrupted.

With parents becoming more and more aware about the dangers of sending their underage children to work as housemaids to cities such as Hyderabad, Vizag and other metros of the country, the traffickers have found novelette ways of targeting young girls.

“Girls are now being cull up by traffickers on their way to home from school. They are shown a pretty picture of the life and are told that they can help their families back home. The few lucky ones who get to visit their families once a while come back wearing jeans and flashy t-shirts. They are projected as role models by traffickers.” says a social worker based out of Hyderabad.

Once the traffickers have the girls, they are taken to Hyderabad in buses and later are shifted to upper middle class households as servants. More than 70 per cent of these girls are tribal’s and have never stepped out of their villages. Life in a metro fascinates them, but when they reach their destination they realise what they have got into.

Put into squalid, suffocating rooms and often beaten up by placement agency owners, these girls have no means to contact their relatives. In some cases they are even sold as bonded labour for a fixed amount of money.

In many other cases, it was also found that immediate relatives of the trafficked victim have pushed them in the trade. Recently, two 'minor' girls approached the police administration pleading to be rescued from their father, who was allegedly forcing them in to flesh trade. They submitted a representation, requesting to the joint collector and police officials, to help them out.

Krati (name changed) would wake up at 5 am every day to sweep, wash and dust the entire house, cook breakfast and pack lunch for the family of five and then go and drop the kids to the bus stop. But she is not the mother of these children nor is she their caretaker. She herself is an 11-year-old child.

Working at the home of a corporate executive at Madhapur, she was made to work at least 12 hours daily, given only two meals and beaten up badly if she made did not do her job well. When she was rescued at the instance of a neighbor, who could not bear to see her regular trauma, she was found to be malnourished.

But Krati is not alone. Sneha (name changed), 13, ran away from her employer's house to be found by a policeman on the streets in Narayanaguda. She had run away from a doctor's house with a swollen ear, scratches on her face and bruises all over her body. The doctor's wife, Sneha says, hit her daily.

Krati came to Hyderabad as a nine year-old from Warangal. Her mother worked for the family's parents in their ancestral village and her mother thought she would be in safe hands. Employing a young boy or girl is not considered a crime. Unless this attitude changes, girls will continue to be trafficked and tortured.

There are thousands of minor domestic helps working in houses, which are meted out the same treatment every day. Child Welfare Committees, NGOs and police have rescued close to 200 minor domestic maids in the past eight months in Hyderabad and surrounding areas.

In Andhra Pradesh, trafficking of minor girls has increased manifold in the past five years and was at an all-time high in 2011. However, statistics also point out

that ‘trafficking for flesh trade’ has been at an all time low. The two facts may seem contrasting only till the time you come know about the disturbing trend that pushing minor girls into the racket of domestic maids has emerged as a far more lucrative business than prostitution.

National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data shows that during 2011 buying girls for prostitution hit an all-time low in Andhra Pradesh. Traffickers are now eyeing the more lucrative business of domestic helps. Members associated with various NGOs confirm that the traffickers are increasingly working for placement agencies.

Rehabilitation remains a challenge

in the first eight months of 2012, a large number of children working as domestic helps have been rescued by police and government agencies as well as NGOs. Most of these children are reunited with their families and some are sent to child welfare homes. But what happens to these children after they are rescued and sent home? Rehabilitation remains a huge challenge for the government. There is no follow-up after a child is sent home to find out how she is doing, thereby increasing the chances of re-trafficking. Without rehabilitation, rescue is meaningless. “Many times I have had to keep the rescued girls in my house. In some cases, especially where sexual abuse is involved, the parents don’t want to accept the girl at all. What do we do in such case? These things have not been covered under the duties of a Child Welfare Committee,” says G. Shalala of CWC – Hyderabad. And while many experts believe that the Juvenile Justice Act is well thought out and a step in the right direction, both its implementation and awareness about it remains low. (Rakshak – The Protector Team, September 2, 2012)

Conclusion

The phenomenon of human trafficking, especially women and children for the purpose of their sexual exploitation can only be tackled if there is an all round and coordinated effort on the part of the State, civil society organizations and citizens in general. The seriousness of the issue needs to be highlighted among all sections of civil society and the State. There has to a zero tolerance approach to the issue

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