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Reintegration as an end of Trafficking Ordeal: A Qualitative Investigation of Victims' Perceptions

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Abstract

The goal of rescue and rehabilitation efforts for child sex trafficking survivors in India is reintegration into the child's family and community. However, survivors sometimes return voluntarily to sex work despite the "reintegration" process. This exploratory qualitative study attempts to examine the victims' perceptions regarding their return to home and aspirations for the future. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 survivors rescued from red light establishments who were residing in a government shelter. Open coding was used to determine thematic content related to the intersection of trafficking, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and the implications for these regarding reintegration successes. The data suggest mandatory repatriation of rescued survivors is often not desirable, as many of the girls were not enthusiastic about their family reunification. The participants who were misled into trafficking through fraud were quite eager to go back to their families, while those who had fled their homes due to domestic violence and later found themselves in a trafficking situation were afraid to return.

Keywords: Rescue, Reintegration, Children, Family-Centric Approach, Qualitative Research.

Introduction

Trafficking of human beings is explicitly prohibited by the Constitution of India and is considered a severe offence. The principal law that addresses trafficking and prostitution in the country is the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (SITA) of 1956 that was later amended to as the Immoral Traffic in Persons Prevention Act (ITPPA) in the year 1986. ITPPA is the chief legislative tool to prevent and combat the trafficking of the sex trade in India. Its prime objective is to inhibit/abolish commercialised vice, i.e., trafficking in

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women and girls for prostitution as an organised means of living. Later, through an amendment child in sex trafficking was brought under the purview of Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015. The JJ Act stipulates provisions for the rescue of children by force from the brothels with provisions for their mandatory rehabilitation, care, and protection. The child victims rescued from the brothels during raids are produced before the Magistrate or the Child Welfare Commission (CWC). If the whereabouts of the victim is missing, the Magistrate sends the victims to shelter home for their rehabilitation and intended home reintegration. The JJ Act states that if a trafficked victim is a child (below 18 years of age), then the child would be treated as a victim in need of care and protection and sent to a protective home for subsequent rehabilitation and home repatriation in the future.

The penultimate goal of rescue and rehabilitation is the reintegration of the trafficked victims in their family and community. Through their return to the home, it presumed that they are being returned to their rightful place. The return to the families' implies the end of the rehabilitation assistance for the victims and so too does the responsibility and obligation of the government towards the victims. Little attention is being paid to find out how fruitful this return would be for the child victims. In this backdrop, this exploratory research attempts to examine the victims' perceptions regarding their return to home and aspirations for the future after being released from the shelter home. To elicit their opinion on return and reintegration and wishes for the future, the research questions posed were, "What do you think about your reunification in your family?" and "How do you perceive your future after exit from the shelter home?"

Methods

The study has exploratory-cum-descriptive research design. The participants for the study were selected through purposive sampling. All participants were sampled using a combination of convenience and snowball approaches. Multiple data sources were used to elicit requisite information for the study. First, trafficked victims (30) were identified as the primary participants. Second, additional information was collected using anthropological tenet of "key informants." The key informants' cohort for the study comprised of superintendent and other staff of the shelter home, NGO personnel, lawyers and parents of the two victims. In addition, case histories (22) of the trafficked victims given by an NGO added additional inputs on the phenomenon.

In-depth interviews and observation were the major tools of data collection for the study. In the backdrop of the sensitive nature of the research, use of any electronic recording device was prohibited. Only a verbal interaction was permissible. Thus, all the interview data were manually recorded in a personal log. A case study protocol provided a guide for data collection. The research protocol was structured as per the World Health Organizations' (WHO) ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003). It was also approved by Institutional Review Board. Research with trafficked victims involves contested repercussions for the safety and well-being of the participants as well as their family. The case study protocol was carefully drafted to avoid direct or probing questions.

An informed consent was obtained from all the participants for the data collection. The Welfare Officers debriefed the victims that participation in research was voluntary. The same was reiterated by the researcher too before the interview sessions. In addition, their discretion to decline a question or withdraw from the interview was also made clear.

Caution, care, and sensitivity were maintained during each interview. If, during the interview, the participant appeared to be uncomfortable or emotionally distraught, the interview was stopped, and the participant was given adequate time to regain composure or to discontinue the interview voluntarily.

Validity and Reliability within a Qualitative Framework

Transferability, thick description, and peer debriefing were employed to establish credibility. The following strategies were used to maintain transferability in the present study:

- Theoretical sampling i.e., the selection of participants who mirrored the group under study;
- Intensive investigation of the participants using multiple case study design to secure broader overview of the phenomenon;
- Use of a standard case study interview protocol that provided consistency in the study; and
- Use of plain, simple, and unassuming language that did not speculate or make statements supporting or rejecting an idea or theory.

Thick, rich description was used in the study to ensure credibility. Interview transcripts, observations, and field notes were analyzed to provide a thick, rich description for systematic evaluation of the subject matter using vivid details about the participants, the setting, and about themes that helped to augment the credibility of the research.

Peer debriefing was also used to establish credibility of the research. The lead researcher constantly engaged in discussion with trusted and knowledgeable peers in the subject in person as well as via electronic mail who provided informed feedback on the research subject. In addition, the research was monitored by a team of experts who frequently evaluated the progress of the research.

Breaking the Ice: Rapport Establishment

The age and gender of the lead author proved to be of asset in this study. The lead author being woman of similar age as to those of the participants at the time of data collection facilitated for them to accept the researcher as an older sister or friend, rather than a researcher or critic. This facilitated rapport to build quickly between the researcher and the interviewees, which was demonstrated by many of the participants enthusiastic to get to know the researcher better—her family history, marital status, whether or not she had children, etc. After an introductory session, an interviewee was invited to participate in an icebreaker, which created a more informal atmosphere and guided the conversation towards the initial questions about family background. One large sheet of page and pen were placed on the floor between the interviewer and the participant. The participant was asked to write her name and alphabets or numerals whatever they were comfortable with. The lead author also participated in this activity and wrote her name and English alphabets. The lead author participated in this activity for two reasons—to slightly diminish the power imbalance by establishing some common ground, and to eliminate any hesitation expressed by the participant over her ability to read and write.

Some of the participants were apprehensive of this activity in the beginning. Later when they were assured that they will not be evaluated on the aesthetics of their writing skills, they grew comfortable and actively participated in this activity. After this rapport building activity, the research took the plunge and began the interview process. It is worth mentioning that some of the victims who had no formal education prior to being trafficked had learnt basic writing skills during their stay at the shelter home and enthusiastically participated in this exercise. In the end, the participants were asked if they had any query regarding the study, or anything else. The transcribed information from the field was analyzed thematically using narratives.

Findings

1. Factors influencing Return and Reintegration

The results reveal contrary to popular belief all victims were not enthusiastic about their return to the family. The responses of the victims highlighted a range of factors that influenced their decision on the return for reunification with their family. The participants who are duped or misled into trafficking context were eager to go back to their family. Deepa (real name not disclosed) replied:

Now I just want to go home. I have not planned anything about future but for now, I just want to go to my home.

A similar response was elicited by Gita (real name not disclosed) who was trafficked by her lover boy. She regrets leaving her home with her boyfriend in pursuit of romantic future which led her into this trap. She is now determined to obey her parents in the future and would not go anywhere without informing her parents. She replied:

Now I will be an obedient girl and will obey my parents, I will not go anywhere without informing my parents.

The findings further suggest that for several victims return to home was not a viable option as their initial movement was motivated by the need to earn money to support their family. They knew that economic crunch would remain and hence, were not very eager to return home. They looked forward to some remunerative work which may help them become economically independent. Here, it must be noted that their inhibition to return to their families does not imply that they resisted reintegration. They were reluctant to return to same conditions of impoverishment which triggered their movement initially leading to being trafficked. Instead they were quite eager to pursue some livelihood which may help them support themselves as well as their family.

Suparna (real name not disclosed) replied:

Just going home will not solve the problem. I need some work.

She was reluctant to be placed back in the home/community instead wanted some means of employment once she is out of the shelter home in order to independently

support herself. Another participant also asserted that she wanted to work to earn money for herself as well as her family. Describing her plans for the future, she replied:

I will work on my own to survive. I am able enough to work and support myself.

Interestingly, narratives suggest that some of the victims wanted to rejoin the brothel due to various reasons. Some of the victims wanted to pursue sex work for a livelihood in the future and were reluctant to go home. They asserted that their lack of education and skills left them with no option other than joining sex work. Dipika (real name not disclosed) wanted to pursue sex work even after her exit from the shelter home. She said:

My husband is dead. I do not know any skills to pursue other work. There is a crevice in the heart of my son who needs to be operated. My daughter is also young, and I need money to bring her up. I was working on my own will, and please let me go there [there refers to the brothel].

She further claimed that her family knew about her involvement in sex work. Moreover, she asserted that every month she sent some money for her son who lived with her mother in Bangalore. Another victim added:

If I will work in sex work at least, I can build my home. I will have money and jewellery. Moreover, later I will get married.

The findings reveal that after being trafficked initially, victims get bewildered and feel placed in an awkward situation. The previous research suggests that the socialization or initiation of the victims in the brothels usually takes place in 3 phases (Pandey et al., 2015). In the first phase of initiation, victims are lured to the glamorous life of the brothels. A very rosy picture of the brothels is presented. They are affectionately handled with utmost care taken to their likes and dislikes and comforts. They are softly approached and are led to believe “home away.” It is primarily based on “child-care” or “baby care” approach. In the second stage, friendly and elderly persuasion follows. It is a stage of integration into the disciplined life system of the brothels. The victims who do not give away to their bargain are exposed to different kinds of atrocities including physical assaults. This is based on “the carrot and stick” approach. The third phase is the phase of consolidation with the brothel life. They become an integral part and active member of the brothel system. They join a group of senior brothel workers who in addition to their works assume responsibility of others’ care as well. They join the senior team of trusted and committed brothel personnel and perform the duties of second-in-command in the brothel system. In this phase, the partnership approach is followed where everyone joins together to pursue the common goal.

The findings reveal that initially the trafficked victims refuse to indulge in sexual activities and resist it tooth and nail, but gradually these withers away and when all hopes belie and turn into despair. It takes 2 to 3 months to acclimatise when victims resign and accept her incarceration the brothel life as a fait accompli. Gradually, with the passage of time, victims learn the tricks of the trade and submit to brothel's life against their will and a cultural belief as sex is a taboo in general conversation in the public domain in Indian society. In their attempt to survive, they may become an ally of the brothel owners. This

is found to affect their rehabilitation and reintegration adversely. Most of the victims, who were rescued earlier, when asked about their reintegration and return to the home, were quite enthusiastic. The victims who have spent some period or who reconcile to the fact of being in a brothel, however, were hard to deal as they often resist all rescue and rehabilitation efforts due to various concerns. Further, those who can get some share of their income through prostitution may find this a viable economic option as currently in India livelihood options are very bleak for semi-literate and unskilled persons in the formal market sector.

The data further suggest that the role of family has been found to be very critical in the return and reintegration of the trafficked victims. The supportive family can facilitate the reunification of the victims and can positively dispense the complexities involved in the reintegration process. The case of Devangana (real name not disclosed) is illustrative in this regard. No sooner she went missing from her home; her mother contacted the police in a bid to locate her daughter. Initially, the police, as usual, were reluctant to register the First Information Report (FIR). However, it was due to the persistent efforts of her mother that Devangna was rescued within fifteen days of captivity from a brothel in Delhi. The researcher met her while she was in Delhi for her trial where she appeared as a witness through the help of a local NGO. Her mother also encouraged her to pursue a trial against her trafficker and participate in legal proceedings. Her mother accompanied her at every proceeding where they were required to report to Delhi. Her brother also accompanied her to Delhi for trials. The efforts of her mother are commendable who against all the odds tried to raise her voice against the evil of trafficking as there are very few prosecutions in cases of trafficking due to unavailability of witnesses. Devangna cited the supporting role of the family in her reintegration which not only facilitated immediate rescue but also eased her return as well as reintegration into the family. However, she was quite distressed due to social ridicule. She replied:

People in my neighbourhood came to know that I was in a brothel in Delhi for some time. Gossips and rumours are running in my neighbourhood. My headmaster asked my family to remove me from the school. I am not able to step out of home due to the stigma. However, my mother and maternal uncle supported me. Without their help, it would have been very difficult. They [the madam and her husband] threatened to kill us even, but I am pursuing the case so that no other girl is trapped into this in future.

She was distressed that even the headmaster of the school believed that she would be a bad influence on other girls and asked her to leave the school. She added neighbours resorted to name calling and tried to ridicule her and family members. However, the persistent support of the family helped her overcome the onslaught leased out by the neighbours and community. The affirmative family not only eased her return but also helped her pursue the trial against the brothel madam, which positively influenced her outlook to save other girls also shortly.

The case of Rekha (real name not disclosed) is also not very dissimilar. Rekha emphasised the positive support from her natal family during trafficking, which made her hopeful of going back to her family and community. She reported being trafficked by her brother-in-law under the pretext of employment opportunity. She was angry that her husband even did not bother to figure out where she has been which made her suspicious

of his complicity in her trafficking. This made her apprehensive that going back with her husband may be problematic for her. Hence, she did not want to go to her husband's family instead she wished to retreat to her natal family or independent establishment. She added that her parents not only tried to locate her through the help of the police and NGO but also provided for her daughter in her absence. She wished to join her natal family who left no stone unturned to retrieve her. Thus, one finds that the decisive role of family is very crucial in return and reintegration of the victims of trafficking.

On the other hand, the cynical retort from the family is found to disrupt the return and reintegration phenomenon. When the victims realise that they are not welcome in their family, reintegration is jeopardised, and in extreme cases, victims are forced to retreat to the same exploitative conditions. The feasibility of the return and reintegration could be easily gauged by the response of their families to the trafficking incident. If the families are not eager to meet their children or take them back, the probability of trafficking is likely. Their families rejected two of the victims who had nowhere to go but to the same brothels from where they were rescued. The stigma of being in prostitution led to the rejection from their families who were unwilling to accept them back due to social outrage or community ostracisation. The family rejection left them destitute leaving them with no other option except rejoining the brothels.

The findings reveal that social stigma is the single most deterrent factor that comes in the way of victims' reintegration or intention to return home. They fear that going back home may not be viable as people in their native places might have come to know about their whereabouts and would not accept her back. They were afraid to face their families and communities and believed that the brothel is the only place where they may find a place. Sangeeta (real name not disclosed) sadly replied:

Stepparents will not accept me back in the home. I do not know what to do or where to go? When I become eighteen, I will return to G B Road.

Another participant was afraid of rejection by her family. She replied:

If they will come to know of this [my involvement in sex trade] my family will not accept me back].

The data further suggest that some of the victims believed that they were responsible for whatever has happened to them and hence, were ashamed of facing their families. Kiran (real name not disclosed) who eloped with her lover boy refused contact with her family as she was afraid that her return would malign the reputation of her parents and siblings.

She replied:

I do not want to go home. My father has already suffered bad name due to me. I do not want to increase additional problems for my sibling.

One of the key informants also reiterated that the duration of the stay in the brothel also influences return and reintegration of victims. If a victim has spent some period in a brothel, she develops inferiority complex which disrupts her rehabilitation and returns. Many times victims resign to this fact and succumb to their fait accompli refusing all

efforts towards return and reintegration. It has been found that many of the victims who reconcile to the fact of being in brothel refuse to reunite with their family due to social stigma and outrage towards sex work. One of the participants reported telling wrong home address upon rescue as she feared she would be sent home. She replied:

I deliberately gave wrong address of my home else they would send me home.

Thus, to conclude the perception to return home or reintegration is directed by the initial motive of movement, the response of the family, and social stigma.

2. Looking Forward

It is found that post-rescue most of the victims remain traumatised by their trafficking experiences. They suffer from various psychological repercussions such as trauma, aggression, depression, anxiety, and dejection with apparent symptoms of anger, frustration, and self-inflicting tendencies. Many of them deliberately indulge in self-inflicting behaviour also as they could not bear with their traumatic experiences. Some of them even recalled suicidal stimuli. One of the participants replied:

I suddenly wake up during nights.....I feel like killing myself.....I tried to kill myself by tying a rope around my neck yesterday....sometimes I feel like killing myself or somebody else.

One of the victims who was trapped under the facade of romantic relations burst in anger during one of the sessions and expressed her desire to kill her trafficker. She could not control her vengeful thoughts for him. She angrily replied:

If I ever come across Raju [her trafficker], I will tear him down.

She was so traumatized by her trafficking that she became vindictive of her trafficker and wanted nothing but to kill him. Some of the other survivors too elicited similar responses and were deeply troubled and saddened by their brothel experiences.

The finding further reveal that through counselling some of the victims were gradually able to overcome their traumatic past and tried to overcome with their troubled past in their ways. Some of them wished to achieve economic independence and create a niche for them in society. They believed that economic dependence is the primary component of vulnerability and hence, wish to pursue some livelihood activities to be able to support themselves and their families after exit from the shelter home. One of the participants who worked as labour at a construction site wanted to rejoin her previous work after her retreat from the shelter home. However, few of the victims displayed higher resilience in overcoming their past and giving back to others. They wished to work with awareness generation for vulnerable and at-risk communities for trafficking. After having dealt with their trafficking experience, they realised that lack of awareness has perpetrated trafficking victimising millions of children across the country. Hence, they wished to spread consciousness about trafficking once reintegrated back in their village and community. Gita (real name not disclosed) was determined to spread information regarding trafficking in the future in her village.

She enthusiastically replied:

I have suffered a lot as well as learned a lot. I will try to spread awareness regarding trafficking in the community. I do not want any other girl to be trafficked shortly.

A similar response was elicited by another victim who also wanted to create awareness regarding trafficking. She reported that low literacy coupled with impoverishment is primarily responsible for trafficking in rural areas and hence, to curtail trafficking more awareness programs should be undertaken. She emphasized that severe punishment could also act as a deterrent for the perpetrators in the future.

The perpetrators should be given harshest punishment.

Interestingly, one of the orphan participants expressed her desire to do something for the other orphans in future. She replied:

I want to work somewhere. I can work as domestic help in any household. I will donate all my assets to some orphanage before I die.

This urge to help others reflects their resilience in coping with adverse situations and potential motivation for recovery and stability.

Discussion

Within the dominant framework, an order is restored through by casting victims back in their families (Berman, 2003 cited in [Segrave, 2009]). An ideal narrative should culminate in family reunification, however, for victims of trafficking things are far from being so simple and straightforward. The in-depth interviews with the victims reveal that mandatory repatriation is not desirable as many of the victims are not enthusiastic about family reunification into their homes. The findings reveal that very few victims look forward to family reunification and are eager to be placed with their family. The data suggest that victims who perceive their families to be supportive and kind are affirmative towards family reunification. For others, fear and guilt arising out of the fact of having been trafficked for sex work; reintegration does not seem to be a viable option.

The victims seriously consider that they would be rejected and shunned by their families and community for their involvement in the sex trade and hence, refused contacts with their family. The disinclination to return to home stems from the stigma attached to the sex work, and probable apprehension, that, their family, parents, or neighbors would not accept them back. While some of the victims were hesitant to go back to their families, they none the less wished to establish themselves in urban places longing to set up a new life in a new environment and as such creating a new place for themselves in society. For some of the victims, rejoining the brothel deem to be a preferable option rather than being sent to their original families. They believe that their return would be a cause of social disgrace to their parents as well as their siblings. They feared that their return would have negative implications for their siblings and thwart the prospects of their marriage and hence were not very hopeful of the return to their family. Also, men often view victims previously engaged in sex work as spoiled and refuse to marry them. They

have a very low probability of ever getting married (a cultural imperative for Indian society) and are treated as outcasts.

The stigma attached to prostitution has been found to exercise considerable implications influencing even victims' perspective and self-identity. Regardless of their having been trafficked, families and communities often refuse to accept individuals upon their return. They are perceived as spoilt women and are victims of gossip and name calling. Trafficked victims are so stigmatised once they have been prostituted, it is challenging for them to regain acceptance in their communities. Even if the family is ready to accept, the response of the community is not very encouraging, and stigma continues to affect their lives (Chen & Marcovici, 2003). Without the support of families or husbands, it is challenging for victims to survive on their own as independent living is hardly an option in the extended family structure of India.

The data reveal that even families are found to reject the victims due to various concerns. Fear of social exclusion from the community compels families to reject the victims as a result of their daughters "shameful" behaviour (Hennink & Simkhada, 2004). Families are found to suffer from the negative implications of their daughter's involvement in sex work and therefore, may refuse to maintain contact with them even after their rescue from the prostitution. Sometimes rejecting the victims may be a deliberate choice on the part of the parents who weigh the negative consequences of accepting their ward over other offspring. It is a rational decision on the part of the parents to sacrifice their one child who has disgraced their family to save other children from the ill-impact of the deeds of the defiant one. They fear that the return of their child will spoil their reputation in the community or reduce the marriage prospects of their other children hence, refuse to accept their child. The victims having nowhere to go thus would preferentially resort to prostitution even after being rescued as has been found in the current study also.

Some of the victims were inclined to rejoin prostitution after their exit from the shelter home for livelihood. The data reveal that victims who get to share the money generated through their sex work may come to view it positively. In the current socio-economic conditions of the country, livelihood prospects are grim for semi-literate and unskilled persons. Their only recourse is an unorganised sector, which is marred by exploitation and abuse practically akin to sex work. The difference in exploitation is often of degree, not of kind. Besides, even if publicly abhorred; prostitution is privately accepted as the best of the given alternatives for females from impoverished backgrounds (Rubenson et al., 2005). Some of the victims who were able to support their families from earnings from sex work which imply that monetary gain from prostitution acts as a contrary disincentive in rescue and rehabilitation (Pandey, 2015; Pandey et al., 2015). Further, despite experiences of violence and exploitation, few victims see the sex trade as the only option of survival for themselves and their families as found in the current study as well as previously reported by Bandyopadhyay et al. (2009), Kara (2009), Karandikar, Gezinski, and Meshelemiah (2013) and Vindhya and Dev (2011). It is found that even after their rescue, victims lack the education and skills to support themselves (Roby, 2005). Research suggests that females in the low economic stratum, with limited educational attainment, perceive trafficking and prostitution from a positive side (Osezua, 2013). Contrary to the popular belief that no female would ever voluntarily choose to prostitute, Crawford (2010) in her study in Nepal found that in several communities of Jhapa, Parsa, and Palpa districts a high proportion of adolescent girls do not want to live

permanently in their villages and hope to travel to urban areas, although they were aware of trafficking.

The duration of stay in a brothel is also found to influence the return and reintegration of the victims. The shorter the victims are exposed to the trafficking condition, the easier it is in rescuing them from such exploitative work and reintegrating them into their family. They are often so traumatised by their trafficking experience that they get dejected and feel unworthy of social presence and thus resign to the fact of being in prostitution rejecting all efforts towards reintegration. The longer they remain in work in exploitative condition, the more they become used to the environment and deny reintegration with their family and community (Mahat, 2011). Hinshaw (2007) found that shame devaluates the individuals in the society (cited in [Hennink & Simkhada, 2004]). Similar findings are reported by Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) based on their study of the reintegration of female ex-prisoners who found that internal and external shaming poses a challenge in rebuilding relationships (cited in [Brunovskis & Surtees, 2013]). In the present study also, some of the participants were afraid of losing their social prestige through the treatment of society and their past experiences. Further, it is found that victims in a brothel are not physically bound which restrain them from escaping the abusive environment. Contrary to popular belief they are not confined by physical barriers that thwart their exit from the brothel. They are not always tied by chains or bound in their captivity which prevents them from escaping the exploitative conditions of the brothels (Pandey, 2015; Pandey et al., 2015). Many times psychological bondage in the form of the inferiority of being involved in sex work or fear of social outrage and rejection from family and community prevent them from escaping from the brothels. Many Nepalis trafficked victims sometimes marry in India or continue with sex work independently even after their rescue or release from the brothels (Hennink & Simkhada, 2004).

The results further reveal that despite their traumatic past, victims can overcome it gradually and move on. Some of them expressed a strong desire to help other vulnerable cohort and were eager to contribute towards their community. This explicitly reflects their resilience and coping with an abusive past. Previous studies suggest that the desire and will to contribute to people with similar traumatic experience can be therapeutic for the victims who positively gain from it. This helps them overcome their trauma and ease their recovery from the traumatic past. If given a chance, it would definitely have positive implications for their recovery and rehabilitation and arrest re-trafficking. In their study of trafficking survivors in the USA, Armendariz, Nsonwu, and Heffron (2014) also found that “giving back to others” is an accurate indication of survivor-hood for the victims. Further, economic independence as desired by them can mitigate the feeling of shame and ease their reintegration.

The findings reveal that the current programs do not take into cognisance the potential role of “family” in reintegration. The victims are directly sent to their home without due consideration for their safety or well-being. Based on the findings of the study, the catalytic function of the family in rehabilitation and reintegration has been conceptualised as the “family-centric approach” (Pandey, 2015; Pandey, Tewari & Bhowmick, 2013). Trafficking is a complex phenomenon involving a range of activities and a multitude of actors and instigated by “vulnerability” at its root. Trafficking is not the product of external elements; its origins primarily lie in the family and the community of the individual. In trafficking discourse, a family is often described as part of a general pattern of vulnerability, for example, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol abuse,

single motherhood (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012). However, the family as an essential component of vulnerability and its role in the reintegration of the victims have not been given due attention.

Being the building block of the society, family exercises a crucial role in the socialisation of an individual. The primary protective mechanism supplied by family is influential in the return and reintegration of the individual. It exercises two functions: minimising vulnerability in the first place, and providing support to victims post-trafficking. Reintegration is mostly dependent on the familial relationships which can support and help cope with experiences of trafficking (Derks, 1998). Victims, who have family and friends to return, choose to seek assistance from their network. Further, lack of healthy family relations negatively affects the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of victims. If a victim comes back to a family and finds that there is none too warmly welcome or greet her, the apprehension goes up the manifold and rehabilitation, and reintegration becomes extremely difficult. Families' role in reintegration and rehabilitation of rescued victims is twofold. While its role is critically crucial and central in victims' rehabilitation, it also creates hindrances in the name of a socially construed family image. Including family dynamics and relationships in reintegration, responses are likely, therefore, to contribute substantially to more efficient and appropriate assistance and protection. By implication, failure to take the family into account in interventions misses an important, arguably even pivotal factor in the reintegration process itself.

Healthy relationships can serve to protect trafficked persons in cases of economic vulnerability and, equally, can be a mitigating factor in cases of social exclusion. However, when family relationships are weak or contrary, they can significantly hinder this process. In the present study, family relationships have been a significant factor, both before risky migration strategies and regarding vulnerability to re-trafficking. Further, in a country like India, where state and civil society assistance is weak, a family is a central source of support and basic safety net underlining the importance of appreciating family dynamics in post-trafficking family reunification. Thus, current interventions for rehabilitation assistance for the victims of trafficking should adopt "family-centric approach" for effective rehabilitation and reintegration. Incorporating "family-centric approach" will not only facilitate the return of the victims to their families but also arrest re-trafficking.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Mandatory repatriation of rescued survivors has often been not desirable, as many of the girls were not enthusiastic about their family reunification. The participants who were misled into trafficking through fraud were quite eager to go back to their families, while those who had fled their homes due to domestic violence and later found themselves in a trafficking situation were afraid to return. Some also expressed feelings of guilt arising out of being trafficked and thus refused to return to their families. Disinclination to return seems to stem from the stigma attached to sex work and apprehension that parents or neighbours will not accept them back, or from fear of returning to an environment characterised by violence and maltreatment. Supportive families not only eased the return of some participants but also helped them pursue legal action against perpetrators, which positively influenced their future outlook and rehabilitation. In the backdrop of the supporting role of the family in reintegration, massive awareness programs about trafficking could be instrumental. Extended counselling of the family along with the

victim may help parents to sensitise towards the trafficking ordeal and aid them in accepting their children back.

The findings further suggest that rehabilitation and reintegration can never exist in a vacuum and can be accomplished only when the factors propelling trafficking are addressed in the first place. Hence, to arrest re-trafficking and facilitate the return and reintegration tailor-made strategies are required, which can address the factors which lead to the victimisation in the first instance. All interventions during the rehabilitation phase must address the potentially vulnerable elements causing trafficking in the first place on the case by case basis. Several participants unanimously echoed the desire for economic independence. The government may help victims find a livelihood option after their release from the shelter home. In this regard, collaboration between local NGOs, and state machinery could be quite fruitful. In Andhra Pradesh, the government provides 200\$ to each victim being sent home for temporary relief. This model could be replicated in other states also. Alternative living arrangements for the child victims who do not wish to return home should be explored such as foster care. The focus of this research was upon the issue of “reintegration” as envisaged by the victims, capturing the experience of the victims after being placed in a shelter home. Future research may undertake reunification as an issue of investigation and include victims who are no longer living in rehabilitation institutions, although this population is challenging to access. An important recommendation from this research is designing tailor-made programs to suit the individual needs for the reintegration as “one size” does not fit all victims.

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