

Trafficking in Women

In a recent symposium organised as part of an *International Congress of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Profession* (Organised by IACAM, supported by UNICEF on 2 Nov 2002 at New Delhi) there were some painfully insight-provoking presentations on the psychosocial dimensions of the survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. To begin with, there were some shocking statistics. It was reported that about 500,000 women per year are trafficked from poorer regions of the world into Western Europe alone. Although, these women are aware that they are trafficked for selling sexual services they were not aware that, they will get to keep only a very small part of the money that they get, that they will be locked and beaten, and that they will have no control over the number and nature of services they will have to provide. It was chilling to hear that advanced inhuman techniques are used to keep the women in compliance. Debt-bondage, violence, threats, physical bondage, guilt, threat of harming their families and so on. One activist from Hyderabad reported a case of a girl being kept with poisonous snakes for days, alone in a chamber, till she agreed to prostitution.

In India, states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are considered "high supply zones." Estimates say that every day about 200 girls and women in India enter prostitution, 80 per cent of them against their will. Total estimate of commercial sex workers in India are two million women, of which at least 25 per cent will be below 18 years. There are at least 0.3 to 0.5 million children in prostitution in India making it one of the favourite destinations of paedophile sex tourists from Europe and the United States. It is also seen that six per cent of the commercial sex workers belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes.

It is hard to miss the connection between poverty and trafficking. It is the poor parents, largely illiterate, whose children find themselves easy preys. Promised employment in town, in the context of high levels of employment, and the lure of the media, particularly the film world, is

tempting many a naïve group. Cultural factors like Devadasi dedication and child marriages play significant roles.

The sharing on the psychosocial impact was further devastating. Opinionless, deceived, forced, painfully initiated, surrounded by an explorative structure of pimps, goons, brothel madams and police, addicted and vulnerable to health hazards, it is multiple trauma for the trafficked women. With a shattered self-esteem, over-loaded with defensive mechanism (aggressive and obsessive), they forget the art of trusting, a basic ingredient to any genuine relationship. Quite often, the trafficker is a known person, a neighbour, family friend even a close relative in whom the victim believed.

Among the ideas on interventions, beginning with prevention, rescue, resettlement and rehabilitation, the most relevant seemed to be the call for an integrated service, combining the family, the peer group, counsellors/therapists, law enforcing agencies, NGOs, Life Skill Providers and others.

The world of the traffickers and the trafficked is often bypassed by the mainstream community. At best, they are part of spicy news, which one reads and forgets. It is time to recognise the enormity of the problem. The de-humanisation that results from the whole drama calls for concerted efforts on the part of the government, NGOs and all concerned. Need for accurate and sensitive data on prevalence of trafficking and the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators of the system is a challenge to researchers.

In the approach and the strategy paper of the Tenth Five Year Plan, there is a call for the social empowerment of women. "The challenging task of social empowerment of women in the coming years is how best to further unfold the positive changes and counter the forces of violence in all its forms through a process of education, regulation and awareness." Trafficking, indeed, is the most inhuman form of violence to women and a denial of human rights.

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