

## Understanding the Causes and Consequences of Women Trafficking in Nepal

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*This article undertakes a comprehensive examination of the causes and consequences of women trafficking in Nepal, employing a descriptive research approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data. The study focuses on elucidating the multifaceted factors contributing to the proliferation of this issue and shedding light on the challenges faced by trafficking victims. The research methodology encompasses primary data collection through field surveys and interviews conducted with 25 trafficking victims in the Sindhupalchok District. Moreover, the consequences endured by trafficking victims encompass various forms of physical and sexual abuse, coerced labour, exploitative practices, and enduring psychological trauma, thereby exerting profound and far-reaching societal implications. Consequently, the study underscores the paramount significance of fostering awareness, fortifying legal frameworks, advancing socio-economic empowerment, and establishing comprehensive support mechanisms for survivors as pivotal strategies in combating women trafficking. By*

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*comprehending the underlying causes and ramifications of this issue, efficacious interventions can be devised to safeguard vulnerable women from exploitation and restore their dignity within the Nepalese context.*

[**Keywords** : Women trafficking, Nepal, Causes, Consequences, Descriptive research]

## **1. Introduction**

Human trafficking is a grave criminal phenomenon characterized by the exploitation of individuals for profit, treating them as commodities. It ranks as the third largest criminal industry globally, following arms and drug trafficking. The estimated annual revenue generated by human trafficking ranges from \$7 billion to \$10 billion, often supported by organized crime groups like mafias (Shrestha, 2013). This abhorrent enterprise subjects victims to prolonged exploitation resembling servitude and slavery. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), each year, an estimated 2 million to 4 million individuals are trafficked across international borders, with an even higher estimate of 600,000 to 800,000 victims trafficked within national borders (UNODC, n.d.). Asia, particularly South Asia, bears a significant burden, with 3.5 million women and youth trafficked annually in Asia and 100,000 victims in South Asia alone. Nepal, in particular, faces significant challenges, with an estimated 120,000 women trafficked annually, including 20% being girls under the age of 16 (Shrestha, 2013).

Addressing the issue of human trafficking requires comprehensive legislation and cooperation at national and regional levels. Harmonizing legal definitions of trafficking, criminal procedures, victim compensation, and strengthening the protection of human rights are crucial steps (Sharma, 2015). Developing a legal framework aligned with international standards plays a vital role in preventing trafficking and exploitation. Furthermore, organizations like Maiti Nepal have emerged as prominent social advocates actively working to protect Nepalese girls and women from various forms of exploitation and violence, including trafficking. Maiti Nepal, founded in 1993, comprises dedicated professionals who actively advocate for victims' rights, conduct criminal investigations, and engage in legal battles against perpetrators (Maiti-Nepal, 2016). Through their advocacy efforts at the local, national, and international levels, Maiti Nepal has gained recognition and made significant contributions to the fight against trafficking.

This study try to investigate the current status of women trafficking in Nepal, aiming to gain insights into its causes, consequences, and the challenges faced by trafficked women. The study seeks to address the lack of awareness about trafficking and the limited perspective that treats it as a conventional crime rather than a violation of human rights. It aims to shed light on the underlying causes and potential consequences of women trafficking in Nepal, highlighting the broader aspects of exploitation beyond equating trafficking solely with prostitution. The study also aims to explore the various challenges and difficulties encountered by women who have been trafficked, including issues related to rehabilitation, re-settlement, poverty, gender-based discrimination, and the impact of armed conflicts, displacement, and migration (Shrestha, 2013).

The purpose of the study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted problem of women trafficking in Nepal, with the ultimate goal of informing and guiding efforts to combat trafficking and protect the rights of victims. By identifying the causes and consequences of trafficking, as well as the challenges faced by victims, the study seeks to contribute to the development of effective laws, policies, and interventions that address the issue holistically. Additionally, the study aims to raise awareness at various levels, including grassroots communities, civil society, and law enforcement agencies, in order to foster a broader understanding of trafficking as a violation of human rights.

## **2. Theoretical Perspective**

There are several sociological perspectives/theories that can be applied to the issue of women trafficking. These perspectives provide insights into the social factors and dynamics that contribute to the occurrence and persistence of trafficking.

Social disorganization perspective focuses on the breakdown of social institutions and the resulting disorganization within communities, which can create an environment conducive to criminal activities like trafficking (Shaw and McKay, 1942). It emphasizes the role of social factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of social control in contributing to trafficking.

Social learning perspective suggests that individuals learn behavior through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Applied to trafficking, it posits that individuals may learn and engage in

trafficking activities due to exposure to social networks and cultural norms that condone or support such behavior (Akers, 1973).

Feminist perspectives emphasize the gendered dynamics and power imbalances that underlie trafficking. These theories highlight how patriarchy, gender inequality, and systemic discrimination contribute to women's vulnerability to trafficking and their exploitation in various forms of labour, including sex trafficking (Cabezas, 2004).

Globalization has been linked to the increased movement of people, labour market disparities, and economic inequalities, which can create conditions that facilitate trafficking (Beck, 1992). This theory highlights how global economic forces and transnational networks intersect with local social contexts to shape patterns of trafficking.

Intersectionality examines how multiple social identities and categories intersect and create unique forms of oppression and vulnerability. Applied to trafficking, it recognizes that women's experiences of trafficking are shaped not only by gender but also by factors such as race, class, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectional perspectives highlight the need to address the specific needs and experiences of different groups of trafficked women.

It is important to note that these perspectives provide different lenses for understanding women trafficking, and multiple perspectives can be used in combination to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### **3. History of Women Trafficking in Nepal**

The history of women's trafficking in Nepal dates back several decades and is deeply intertwined with socio-economic, cultural, and political factors. Nepal has long been a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking, particularly for women and girls. This section provides a detailed overview of the history of women's trafficking in Nepal, highlighting key developments and factors that have contributed to the problem.

Historically, the practice of women's trafficking in Nepal can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, labour migration to India was prevalent, and cases of women being lured or coerced into various forms of exploitation, including forced labour and prostitution, were reported (Shrestha, 2013). However, it was in

the 1980s and 1990s that trafficking emerged as a major concern in Nepal, with increasing numbers of women and girls being trafficked both internally and across international borders.

One of the significant factors contributing to women's trafficking in Nepal is the prevalent gender inequality and discrimination. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms, limited opportunities for education and employment, and the devaluation of women's roles in society make Nepalese women and girls particularly vulnerable to trafficking (Shrestha, 2013). Moreover, poverty and economic hardships further exacerbate the problem, as traffickers often exploit the desperation of individuals and families living in impoverished conditions.

The political context of Nepal has also played a role in shaping the dynamics of trafficking. The decade-long armed conflict between the government and Maoist rebels (1996-2006) led to increased violence, displacement, and vulnerability, creating a fertile ground for trafficking. Additionally, the political transition and unstable governance after the conflict further complicated efforts to combat trafficking effectively.

In response to the growing concern of women's trafficking, both national and international efforts have been made to address the issue. Nepal enacted its first anti-trafficking law, the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, in 1986. However, these early laws were limited in scope and failed to adequately address the complexities of trafficking. Over the years, various legislative and policy measures have been introduced, including the enactment of the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007 and subsequent amendments, aimed at strengthening the legal framework to combat trafficking and protect the rights of victims.

International organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society have also played a crucial role in addressing women's trafficking in Nepal. Organizations such as Maiti Nepal, established in 1993, have been at the forefront of providing support, rehabilitation, and advocacy for trafficking survivors (Maiti-Nepal, 2016). These organizations have worked to raise awareness, conduct rescue operations, provide shelter and counseling services, and engage in legal battles against traffickers.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain in effectively combating women's trafficking in Nepal. Weak law enforcement,

corruption, lack of awareness, and limited resources pose significant obstacles. Additionally, the complex nature of trafficking, evolving tactics used by traffickers, and the transnational aspect of the crime further complicate prevention and prosecution efforts (Shrestha, 2013).

In conclusion, the history of women's trafficking in Nepal spans several decades and is influenced by factors such as gender inequality, poverty, political instability, and weak legal frameworks. Efforts to combat trafficking have been made at both national and international levels, involving legislative measures, organizational initiatives, and advocacy. However, challenges persist, and ongoing efforts are needed to address the multifaceted nature of trafficking, protect the rights of victims, and ensure effective prevention, prosecution, and rehabilitation mechanisms.

#### **4. Methodology**

The research design for this study adopts a descriptive research approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. The study focuses on the victimization of women, specifically in the context of trafficking, and aims to understand the reasons for the increasing problem and the challenges faced by victims. The study area selected is the national women's commission, which provides access to detailed and factual information relevant to the topic. The data collection involves primary sources through field surveys and interviews with trafficking victims, as well as secondary sources such as published books, newspapers, and reports from national and international organizations. The study's universe consists of 25 trafficking women in the Sindhupalchok District. Data analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative techniques, providing a comprehensive interpretation of the collected data.

#### **5. Data Presentation and Analysis**

##### **5.1 Caste/Ethnicity**

The study reveals a heterogeneous caste and ethnic composition among the respondents. Individuals from various castes and ethnic backgrounds, such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Magar, Tamang, Majhi, Rai, Kami, Newar, and Damai, were included in the research sample. This diverse representation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, considering the



perspectives and experiences of individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

**Table-1 : Distribution of Respondents by Caste/Ethnicity**

Caste/ Ethnicity	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Chhetri	3	12.0
Brahman	1	4.3
Magar	1	4.0
Newar	1	4.0
Tamang	12	48.0
Kami	4	16.0
Damai	1	4.0
Majhi	1	4.0
Rai	1	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The study indicates that the majority of respondents, comprising 48% of the total, belong to the Tamang community. This finding can be attributed to the fact that the research was conducted in Sindhupalchok district, where the Tamang community constitutes a significant portion of the population. Table 1 further reveals that 16% of the respondents identified themselves as Kami, 12% as Chhetri, and the remaining 4% represented other ethnic groups.

Interestingly, among the Tamang respondents, a significant number reported having good educational backgrounds. However, they expressed a lack of awareness about the issue at hand, which contributed to their vulnerability and subsequent victimization. This insight highlights the importance of raising awareness and providing education on such issues to ensure the protection and empowerment of individuals from all backgrounds, including the Tamang community.

## **5.2 Age Group of Respondents**

The women and children are found facing the problems from early childhood to the old age. It seems to be a very serious problem where women are deprived of their basic human rights. Table-2 presents data on the age of the respondents at the time of trafficking on next page.

**Table-2 : Age of Respondents at the time of Trafficking**

Age group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
15-19 years	15	60.0
20-24 years	7	28.0
25 years and above	3	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The table indicates that the highest percentage of women and girls who were trafficked falls within the age group of 15-19 years, accounting for 60% of the total respondents. Following this, 28% of the victims were in the age group of 20-24 years, while a smaller proportion of 12% were trafficked in the age group of 25 years and above.

These findings suggest that women and girls between the ages of 15-25 are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation. The study further concludes that a significant number of girls and women were trafficked between the ages of 15-19. This could be attributed to their relative immaturity and vulnerability during this stage of life. Adolescents in this age group may be more easily influenced and persuaded by others, making them susceptible to the tactics of traffickers. Thus, the findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions and awareness programs to protect and empower young girls during this critical period of their lives, reducing the likelihood of them falling victim to trafficking.

### **5.3 Marital Status of Respondents**

Several studies have consistently reported that a significant majority of trafficked girls are unmarried. This is primarily due to the high demand for virgin girls in the sex market. Although child marriage is illegal in Nepal, it is still practiced in some communities. There is a prevalent belief in Nepalese society that marrying off young daughters before their first menstruation will ensure the parents' entry into heaven.

In addition to cultural beliefs, economic factors also contribute to child marriages. In some cases, young girls are married to older boys, typically between 10-20 years old, because the boy's family requires a domestic servant to work in their household and fields.



These arrangements are often driven by economic constraints, as the boy’s family may not be able to afford to hire a paid worker. Within these marriages, the daughter-in-law often finds herself in a position similar to servitude while her husband pursues education, migrates for higher studies, or works in urban areas where he interacts with women who have more freedom and independence. Unfortunately, this situation exposes the daughter-in-law to numerous challenges and hardships. As she desires a more comfortable life and seeks employment opportunities outside her home, she becomes vulnerable and may unknowingly fall victim to trafficking.

These societal dynamics and the lack of opportunities for women within their marital households contribute to their vulnerability to trafficking. Efforts to address these issues should focus on raising awareness, empowering women, combating child marriage, and creating opportunities for education and employment, enabling women to lead more independent and secure lives.

**Table-3 : Marital Status of Respondents at the time of Trafficking**

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unmarried	12	48.0
Married	10	40.0
Divorced	1	4.0
Separated	2	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

Only 48.0% of respondents were found to be unmarried. The table shows that 40.% of total respondents are married. Similarly, the percent of divorced and separated were 4.0% and 8.0% respectively.

**5-4 Perceived Reason behind Trafficking**

Majority of the girls and women belonged to lower class family who didn’t have enough food to run their life easily. Most of the girls/women were trafficked in search of employment, lack of awareness, low economic condition, willingness to live in urban areas all become the cause of trafficking. Table-4 depicts data on the perceived reason behind trafficking on next page.

**Table-4 : Perceived Reason behind Trafficking**

Causes	No. of Respondents	Percentage
To earn money	7	28.0
In search of employment	10	40.0
To improve economic status	1	4.0
False marriage	2	8.0
Willingness to stay in urban area	1	4.0
Love marriage	2	8.0
Others	2	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that 40.0% of total were trafficked in search of employment. 28% of them to earn money, 4.0% to improve economic status. The study reveals that poverty is the root cause of trafficking. Most of them were trafficked due to poverty. Other reason behind trafficking is false marriage, love marriage, willingness to stay in urban area. Most of the key informants reported poverty is the main reason. The lack of education, unemployment, lack of awareness was also reported by many informants.

### **5-5 Reactions after Trafficking**

In this research researcher found that though, they tried to escape from there but most of them could not get success. Their protests were suppressed by repeated violence by brothel owner.

**Table-5 : Reactions after Trafficking**

Reactions after Trafficking	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Crying, shouting	5	20.0
Try to Ran away	15	60.0
Try to Call Family Member	5	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that when they knew they were trafficked at first all of them started to crying and shouting. They said that they didn't get any idea at first, they were so scared. And after that some of them try to escape from there, some tried to call family member with the help of brothel's friends, customer.

### 5.6 Violence in Brothel

Respondents continued that if they didn't obey the brothel owner they didn't get food. They have to earn money making customer happy if they couldn't earn money they have to face physical problem like above mentioned. In brothel the respondent get very bad behaviour. And if they tried to escape from there the same punishment repeated till 1 month.

**Table-6 : Violence in Brothel Faced by Respondents**

Type of Violence	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Cigarette burns	23	76.7
Unwanted sexual activities	17	56.7
Electric shock	19	63.3
Do not provide food	7	23.3
Beating	19	63.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that all of them had to face many kind of violence. 76.7% of them tolerate cigarette burns, 56.7% compelled to do unwanted sexual activities, 63.3% had to suffer from electric shock and 63.3% were beaten by brothel owner.

### 5.7 Helper for Returning from Brothel

The respondent said that they get help from Brothel's friend, they helped them because they knew the pain suffering so they want to save those new respondent. And also some customer helps them by giving their phone to call their family member. And some of them rescued by Maiti-Nepal, they continued that Maiti Nepal's staff entered in brothel by being a fake customer and they helped the girl/women to escape from there. And some of them threw out by brothel owner after being HIV positive.

Table-7 shows the type of helper for returning from brothel on the next page. It is evident from the data in this table that, among 25 respondents 20 or 80.0% were rescued by the help of brothel's friends, 4.0% were rescued by customer, 8.0% were rescued by Maiti-Nepal and 8.0% were dumped after disease.

**Table-7 : Helper for Returning from Brothel**

Helper	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Brothels' friends	20	80.0
Dumped after disease	2	8.0
Maiti-Nepal	2	8.0
Customer	1	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source : Field Survey, 2023

### 5-8 Present Work of Respondents

The study showed that maximum number of respondents was involved in some kind of work, but very limited number were involved in some income generating activities. Others were on training process or studying.

**Table-8 : Present Work of Respondents**

Present work	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Working	5	20.0
Studying	4	16.0
Taking Skill development Program	6	64.0
Others	10	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source : Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that among 25 respondent 5 or 20. % are working. Similarly, 16.0% are studying with the help of Maiti-Nepal. 64% are taking skill development training and 40.% doing others. Respondent told that in others work they are housewife, some do agricultural work in house. Among 25 of working respondent, some work in restaurant as waiter, some are engaged in labour work, some work in office.

### 5-9 Health Problems

Health problem is main problem in brothel returned girl/ women. Some of them successes to escape from there but some have to live there until they are dumped after HIV positive. The study shows that total respondent checked-up their health. Table-9 depicts data on the types of health problem of respondents on next page.

**Table-9 : Types of Health Problem of Respondents**

Health problem	No. of Respondents	Percent
Sexual and reproductive health problem	20	80.0
Psychological Problem	2	8.0
Both Physical and Psychological	3	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The data contained in the table above show that 80% have sexual and reproductive health problem, 8% physical problem and both problem is 12%. It clears that most of brothel girl/women did have some kind of physical problem. They suffered from some kinds of diseases when they were rescued from the brothel of India. They had suffered from sexually transmitted disease. Some of them suffered from HIV/AIDS also. The study reveals that all the respondents do suffer from one or the other physical as well as psychological problems.

## **6. Findings of the Study**

Presentation and analysis of data collected from the selected trafficked girls/women as well as the interviews with them show the following findings :

- ▶▶ **Ethnic composition of trafficked girls/women :** Ethnic composition of trafficked girls/women shows that 40% are from the Tamang caste, 20% Magar, 13.3% Kami, 10% Chhetri, and 3.3% each for Brahmin, Damai, Majhi, and Rai castes.
- ▶▶ **Marital status of trafficked girls/women :** Marital status of trafficked girls/women shows that 56.7% are unmarried, 33.3% married, 3.3% divorced and remaining 6.7% separated.
- ▶▶ **Religious background of trafficked girls/women :** Religious background of trafficked girls/women shows that a little less than two-third (60%) are Hindus and remaining four out of every ten (40%) Buddhists.
- ▶▶ **Age distribution of trafficked girls/women :** Age distribution of trafficked girls/women clearly indicates that nearly two-third (63.3%) are aged between 15-19 years, nearly one-fourth (23.3%) from the age group of 20-24, and remaining nearly one out of every seven (13.3%) are aged 25 and above.

- ▶▶ **Lack of awareness about trafficking** : Data show that more than three-fourth of the victims (80%) didn't have prior knowledge about trafficking, only one-fifth (20%) had some knowledge which they acquired through radio, television, family, or other sources.
- ▶▶ **Reasons for trafficking** : Reasons for trafficking indicate that 43.3% choose this for employment, 30% to earn money, 3.3% for economic improvement, 6.7% due to false marriage promise, 6.7% for love marriage, and remaining 6.7% for other reasons.
- ▶▶ **Traffickers** : As regards traffickers 46.7% were kin members, 16.7% neighbors, 6.7% husbands, 6.7% friends, and 23.3% others.
- ▶▶ **Victims' experiences** : Upon realizing they were trafficked, all victims reacted with crying and shouting. Half of them (50%) tried to escape, one-fifth (20%) attempted to call family, and many suffered physical abuse like cigarette burns, sexual exploitation, electric shocks, beatings, etc.
- ▶▶ **Post-rescue living situations** : Post-rescue living situations show that a little less than half (46.7%) are now in Maiti Nepal rehabilitation homes, half (50%) back with their families, and remaining 3.3% are living independently.
- ▶▶ **Current activities of victims** : Current activities of victims show that 30% are working, 16.7% studying with Maiti Nepal's help, 20% are in skills development programs, and 33.3% are engaged in other activities like housework or assisting in agriculture.
- ▶▶ **Monthly income** : Earned between 1500 and 4000, with only 33.3% earning enough for livelihood; others rely on support from family and Maiti Nepal.
- ▶▶ **Health conditions** : Health conditions of the selected victims show that 84.2% have physical problems, 10.5% psychological problems, and remaining 5.3% have both of these problems.
- ▶▶ **Socio-economic challenges** : Trafficked women/girls face social discrimination, physical and mental health issues, lack of acceptance from family and society, and difficulty reintegrating into society.

## 7. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the demographic characteristics, experiences, and challenges faced by trafficked girls and women in



Nepal. The findings highlight the vulnerability of lower-class families dependent on agriculture, with the majority of victims belonging to ethnic groups such as Tamang, Magar, Kami, Chhetri, and others. The age distribution indicates that a significant portion of victims are adolescents, particularly between the ages of 15 and 19. Lack of awareness about trafficking among victims is a concerning issue, with 80% having no prior knowledge of this crime. Reasons for trafficking vary, ranging from seeking employment and earning money to false marriages and love relationships. It is alarming to note that a significant proportion of traffickers are kin members, neighbors, and even husbands, betraying the trust placed in them.

The study highlights the urgent need for stronger punitive measures against traffickers and improved rescue and rehabilitation efforts at the governmental level. Additionally, addressing the negative perception of survivors in society is crucial to reduce the stigma, humiliation, and self-pity they experience. The lasting impact of trafficking on survivors is evident, with physical, psychological, and socio-economic challenges hindering their recovery and reintegration. To combat human trafficking effectively, comprehensive efforts should include awareness campaigns, improved educational opportunities, livelihood support, and accessible healthcare services. Empowering survivors through skill development programs and creating a supportive and inclusive environment will be instrumental in helping them rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society successfully.

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