

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING STIGMATIZATION OF RESCUED TRAFFICKED GIRLS IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT: Every year thousands girls and women from various age groups are trafficked across border of Nepal. Though multiple organization are currently working for the trafficked girls and their rehabilitation purposes, the socio-cultural taboo and stigma present in the community and the perceived stigma among these girls make the reintegration process difficult. The main aim of this study was to understand the various socio-cultural factors that lead to perceived stigma among the rescued trafficked girls in Nepal. A cross-sectional descriptive study and in-depth interview were used by using the questionnaire among the rescued trafficked girls from the organization called Shakti Smauha in Nepal. 150 girls were randomly selected from the four branches of Shakti Smauha, for the quantitative study and 5 girls were chosen for in-depth interview. A descriptive statistics, chi-square and multiple logistic regression were used for analysis purpose. 68.7% were found to be highly stigmatized with about 60% were found to have internalized stigma, perceived stigma and community level stigma. The current occupational status and skills and trainings provided in the organization were found to be significant with the stigma in the chi-square analysis and multiple logistic regressions. The satisfaction level of the girl who currently unemployed were almost 3 times more likely to have high stigma with $p=0.043$ (OR=3.105, CI=1.036-9.308) than the girls who were satisfied with the job. Similarly skills and trainings provided was also found to be significant with stigma with girls who received skills and trainings in the organization almost 4 times more likely to have stigma (OR=3.615, CI=1.307-9.996) compared to the girl who did not receive any trainings. The in-depth interview were also found to be consistent result with those girls who were highly stigmatized, it was revealed the employed were sometimes discriminated in the work place making them highly stigmatized. So if they received any kind of trainings and skills, they would be independent from the stigma. Further study should be conducted to understand the stigma from other aspects like perception of community and family so that it would help to find the loophole and make the organizational program to reduce the stigma more successful.

Keywords: Rescued trafficked girls, Stigma, Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is the cruel violation of rights that is prevalent in the world regardless of countries or region [1]. Every year numerous girls and women of various age group are trafficked across border [2, 3] which makes more difficult to solve the problem as it has become an integral source of economy in many developed countries especially in South Asia [4]. Female trafficking is prevalent in the society for a long time which

makes the women deal with exploitation and violence subjecting them to huge mental and physical trauma called stigma which the organization dealing with these girls will assess by interview. This situation was exploit them and their family [5]. According to the increasing of sex demand around the world, girls from Nepal and many poor countries are hired for their better life in the future [6].

If we look at the various data's more than 60,000 people are trafficked constituting 80% of females [7] with only central Asia and Eastern Europe consisting of 200,000- 175,000 [8] as large

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as 127 countries being exploited affecting all the continent and economy [7].

Leading organization working in trafficking reported that at least 2,133 women and children were rescued from trafficking to India in the period of 10 months [9]. As the problem is quite big in Nepal and has catches global interests there are very few research done with very few focus on socio-cultural discrimination and stigma faced by these girls [10].

The social status of the rescued trafficked girls was in condition which were separated from the ordinary people like prostitutes and harassment with inadequate right to use the facilities like education and health leading them poverty and illiteracy [11] making it very difficult to adjust in normal life where they are often discarded by the society making the work of rehabilitating these women back in the community unsuccessful [12].

This paper tried to focus on the socio-cultural stigma faced by these girls after their journey back home. Every year many organizations working for these women tries to rescue the girls from the brothels of India which is the main hub for the buying and selling of these girls, though the rescue of the girls and coming back home is not the last journey for them after their return they face a lot of social and cultural stigma and even their own family rejects their identity and are unwilling to accept them back in their house.

Theoretical framework: Erving Goffman tried to investigate the interpersonal organization of stigma and how it has the major impact on our life through self-identification which seems to be consistent in the vulnerable groups who are doing their best to return to the society [13]. The various aspects of human characteristics with their own perception of events in their life makes a huge contribution to the stigma faced by a particular individual [14].

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study and in-depth interview were conducted from December 2012 to April 2013 among the rescued trafficked girls of the women who were currently living or were supported by the organization called Shakti Smauha in Nepal. The 150 respondents were selected by simple random sampling techniques. 20 girls were from the rehabilitation center in Kathmandu of Shakti Samuha from Kathmandu, 25, 45 and 60 were from Simara, Bara and Makwanpur respectively. A pretest was conducted among 30 randomly selected girls with the history of trafficking from the

organization with the Cronbach's alpha as 0.072 considered as reliable. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to take interview of the rescued trafficked girl's consisting of basically 4 parts: socio demographic characteristics, duration of stay, skills and training provided by the organization and perceived stigma among those girls. Similarly in-depth interview was conducted among 5 girls who were randomly selected from the quantitative data's by using the interview guidelines. The perception part was assessed by using 5 Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. It consisted of three constructs representing perceived, internalized and community stigma level. There were 2 negative and 13 positive statements. For positive statements, an "agree" and "strongly agree" was scored as "4" and "5" respectively, "3" points for "uncertain" and for "strongly disagree" and "disagree" was 1 and 2 points respectively. To calculate the stigma level among the rescued trafficked girls, the total score of three level of self-stigma; perceived, internalized and community level stigma, the stigma score were compiled and categorized into high and low stigma by using the mean stigma score of 51.71 as a cutoff point. Those respondents whose total score was below 51.71 were categorized as low stigma and those respondents whose score was above 51.71 were categorized as high stigma.

Likewise all the in-depth interview was transcribed in English and content analysis was done for the further process. A written permission was taken to conduct the study from the Shakti Smauha and the questionnaire was approved by the organization to conduct the study and informed oral consent was taken from the respondent prior to the study.

Statistical analysis

For the data entry licensed Epi-data was used and licensed SPSS 16.0 was used for analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequency, mean, median, standard deviation, quartile deviation and percentage for describing the distribution. Pearson Chi square test were used to explore the associations of independent variables with the perceived stigma. Variable with probability *p value* <0.05 from the chi-square analysis was put in the multiple logistic regressions to find the strength of association, between statistically significant variables with results expressed as adjusted odds ratio. The level of significance was set as 5% (*p value* <0.05).

Table 1 Number and Percentage of general characteristics

Characteristics	n = 150	Percentage
Age group (years)		
<20	28	18.7
20-29	80	53.3
>29	42	28.0
Mean= 26.28, Min= 18, Max=40,SD=5.596		
Educational level		
Illiterate	32	21.4
Informal	63	42.0
Primary level	38	25.3
Secondary level	17	11.3
Marital status		
Unmarried	63	42.0
Married	70	46.7
Divorced	15	10.0
Live in relationship	2	1.3
Employment status (current)		
Yes	78	52.0
No	72	48.0
Types of work		
In the organization/volunteer	41	52.6
Small scale business	23	29.5
Others	14	17.9
Skills/Training/Support		
Yes	105	70
No	45	30
Duration of stay in India		
<=6	84	56.0
>6	66	44.0
Mean=5.866, SD=3.135, Min=0, Max=14		

RESULTS

Quantitative analysis

General characteristics

As shown in the Table 1 the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents consist of their age, occupational status marital status, education level and types of work they have been doing. More than half of the respondents (53.3%) were 20-29 years old, 28% were more than 29 years old and 18.7% were less than 20 years of age. Regarding educational status 21.4% were illiterate and rest 78.7% at least received some kind of education. Likewise, 42% of the respondents were unmarried and 46.7%, 10% and 1.3% were married, divorced or were in live in relationship. In the occupational status, 52% were currently employed in some kind of work and 42% were not engaged in any kind of work. In case of skills and trainings provided by the organization 105(70%) respondents said that they received some kind of skills and trainings from the organization whereas 30% of the respondents said that they received no such kind of trainings.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of the girls before they were trafficked. More than

half of the girl (54.7%) belonged to the age group 10-15 years old. 18% less than 10 years old when they were trafficked. At the time of trafficking, 21% of the girls were married and 41.3% were employed. 22% of the girls reported that they were trafficked 2 times and 2.7% were sold for more than two times.

Table 3 showed the number and percentage of the girls with the high and low stigma. The total mean score was calculated and two scale were determined using the mean score 51.71. Those respondents whose total score was below 51.71 were categorized as low stigma and those respondents whose score was above 51.71 were categorized as high stigma. Out of 150 girls, 103(68.7%) were highly stigmatized and 47(31.3%) belonged to the group with lower stigma level.

In the context of chi-square test, Table 4 showed that variables of age, education, marital status and duration of stay were found not to be significantly associated with the level of stigma. However, occupational status ($p < 0.001$) and skills and training provided in the organization after their rescue ($p = 0.011$) were found to be significantly

Table 2 Number and percentage of general characteristics of the girls before being trafficked

Characteristics	n	Percentage
Age group (n = 150)		
<10	27	18.0
10-15	82	54.7
>15	41	27.3
Mean=13.24, SD=3.665, Minimum=6, Max=25		
Marital status (n = 87)		
Married	21	24.1
Unmarried	66	75.9
Employment status (n=150)		
Yes	62	41.3
No	88	58.7
Types of work (n=62)		
In the carpet factory	23	37.1
Labor/household work	30	48.4
Others	9	14.5
Number of times being trafficked (n = 150)		
1	113	75.3
2	33	22.0
More than 2	4	2.7

Table 3 Number and percentage of positive and negative stigma

Stigma	n = 150	Percentage
<51.71	47	31.3
≥51.71	103	68.7
Mean=51.71, SD=1.37, Min=21, Max=74		

Table 4 Association of independent variables with stigma of rescued trafficked girls

Characteristics	Stigma				p- value
	Low		High		
	n =	%	n =	%	
Age (years)					
<20	12	42.9	16	57.1	0.087
20-29	27	33.8	53	66.5	
>29	8	19.0	34	81.0	
Educational status					
Illiterate	7	21.9	25	78.1	0.193
Literate	40	33.9	78	66.1	
Marital status					
Unmarried	21	33.3	42	66.7	0.653
Married/separated	26	29.9	61	70.1	
Occupational status					
Working	32	51.6	30	48.4	<0.001***
Not working	15	17.0	73	83.0	
Occupational status (before trafficking)					
No	33	37.5	55	62.5	0.052
Yes	14	22.6	48	77.4	
Duration of stay					
≤6	31	36.9	53	63.1	0.097
>6	16	24.2	50	75.8	
Skills and trainings received					
Yes	41	40	64	60	0.002**
No	6	17.8	39	82.2	

associated with the stigma level among the trafficked girls.

In Table 4 the independent variables which were statistically significant with the dependent

variables through Chi-square test were additionally tested by multiple logistic regressions to find the strength of association by adjusting other variables. In regards of the job satisfaction level among the

Table 5 Multiple logistic regression model between the dependent and independent variables

Variables	Adj OR	95% CI		p- value
		Lower limit	Upper limit	
Occupational status				
Working	1			
Not working	2.329	0.842	6.443	0.103
Occupational status before trafficking				
Working	1			
Not working	3.468	1.530	0.676	0.308
Skills and trainings received				
Yes	1			
No	3.615	1.307	9.996	0.013*
Job satisfaction				
Satisfied	1			
Unsatisfied	3.105	1.036	9.308	0.043*

Table 6 Summary of the key themes of rescued trafficked girls and stigma

Themes	Quotes
Importance of education	<i>There is a lot of changes in people life because of education, trafficked girls never get a chance to get an education making them more vulnerable. I always think if I got the chances to study and was educated I would have never been a victim of trafficking.</i>
Economic status	<i>Poverty is definitely the most important part determining the girl's future like us. We had no food or jobs and no family income, my parents were struggling to survive and I thought maybe it would be good if I will go out to earn.</i>
Employment opportunities	<i>We can never work outside. I have tried working outside the organization. If the owner knows about our status then they discriminate us, so working in the organization helps us a lot as I know people who work here understand my situation more clearly. Employment opportunities definitely help us to stand on our own feet and raise our head in the society with pride.</i>
Importance of skills and trainings	<i>We don't have many skills and are less educated and technically poor than other workers, so we don't get the chance to work. Skills and trainings help us to stand on our feet and make us prepared for the future. The girls should be asked what they need and should be provided with the need based approach. Like those who want to study they should have a chance to study.</i>
Difficulty in repatriation	<i>If the girls do not get any support from anyone, they will return back. The people who were caught for trafficking are immediately go to the jail because they are very powerful and have great influence which leads to increase the risk among us.</i>
Stigma	<i>I have never told other people what I went through or what I felt because I think they would never understand me. I will never get job in any house if they know about my precious status as trafficked girl who worked in India though I am currently working in a very reputed organization. "Whores" are the mostly common words used for us. People in the society do not allow their daughters to go out with us as they think we are the bad influence.</i>

currently employed girls, who were unsatisfied with their current employment were almost 3 times more likely to have high stigma (OR=3.105, CI=1.036-9.308) as compared to satisfied girls. Likewise, skills and trainings provided in the organization were found to be significantly associated to stigma with those who did not receive

skills and trainings almost 4 times (OR=3.615, CI=1.307-9.996) more likely to have high stigma among these girls (Table 5).

Qualitative analysis

To get more insight about the stigma among the rescued trafficked girls, 5 girls were selected on

the random basis from 150 girls who took part in quantitative survey. Various questions were asked regarding their life and experiences based on the in-depth interview guidelines and the information were analyzed by doing content analysis (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The recognition that trafficking is a significant problem within Nepal has led to a number of initiatives to respond to the issues trafficking in recent year [15].

The result showed that, more than half of the respondents (54.7%) were trafficked between the age group of 10-15 and 10% of respondents were trafficked when they were under 10 years old showed that they were trafficked when they were young similar to another study which the children were trafficked at the very young age of below 11 years old [16]. For the education level, 21.3% was found not to be significantly associated ($p = 0.208$) with the stigma which seems to be correlating to the another one where 32.5% of the trafficked children were uneducated [16]. Likewise 46.7% of the total girls who was trafficked was married with no significant association between the stigma and marital status ($p=0.653$ and $CI=0.425-1.711$). But some studies found that only 21.1% [17] and 62.3% were unmarried [18].

The employment status of the current study found that 48% were unemployed and currently employed girls who were unsatisfied with their jobs was almost 3 times more stigmatized than the girls who were satisfied with their jobs [$OR=0.043$, $CI=1.036-9.308$]. Predictors were more likely to have 3 times higher stigma compared with these girls. Out of the employed girls 52% were currently working in the organization both as an employee or as volunteer to raise awareness and other purposes. Similarly in the working girls before trafficking 41.3 % used to work out of which 48.4% works as households worker or labor. Another study conducted among survivors of human trafficking in Nepal, 69.97% of the women were currently employed, similar to the current research [16]. This current research showed that the girls who were employed are satisfied with their jobs and had better employment opportunities. They were more confident and independent in the community which some of the girls who were unsatisfied with the current occupational status are suffering from higher level stigma even they have employment opportunity.

“Employment opportunities definitely help us to stand on our own feet and stayed in

the society with pride”.

Though we are employed, we have to suffer from a lot of discrimination.

In contrast, rescued highly stigma trafficked girl believed that it will be difficult to work in the community or to get any job in the future [19].

“If the people know about my status they will discriminate us no matter what is my current status. Working and having good education will not help to reduce the discrimination”.

In the current research 44% of the girls stayed in India more than 6 years with no significant association with the high stigma ($p=0.097$) which seems very much contrasting to another study which only 6.7% of the girls stayed in India for more than 6 years [14]. It is assumed that longer duration of stay make the girls more stigmatized.

“The longer time we have spent the more we have to suffer from disease. People directly links as the longer duration of stay, they will suffer with the disease like HIV and AIDs which makes us more stigmatized”.

In regards of skills and trainings, 30% of the women got no skills and trainings in the organization and interestingly were found to be significantly associated with the high stigma ($AOR=3.615$, $CI=1.307-9.996$) at the significance level $p=0.011$. which seems related to the qualitative survey as the girls expressed that skills and training make them more confident to receive and increase their capability to be independent providing a different insight to the story.

“These kinds of skill and training help us to raise our confidence level to stay in the society in the society. If I am able to work than I do not have to listen the entire bad things these people say to me”.

CONCLUSION

The job satisfaction level and skills and trainings were found to be important predictor with the stigma among the rescued trafficked girls though the unsatisfied with the current work and those who didn't have any skills and trainings seems to be highly stigmatized. So the organization should focus on giving employment opportunities and trainings and skills as those are highly important factor in reducing the stigma among the

rescued trafficked girls as finding out the factor that those who are currently no happy with their jobs, their reasons and initiation to solve those problem It was found that most of the girls agreed that the work done by this organization is good and the thoughts of the people are changing but still there are some gaps in the work they have done and awareness is limited to the place where there is the organization office and the rural part of Nepal still has the same kind of discriminations. The current study only focuses in the perception of the girls who were trafficked, so further study should be conducted to understand the stigma from those other aspects which will help to find the loophole and make the organizational program to reduce the stigma more successful.

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