

## Role played by social workers in Non Governmental Organizations in preventing human trafficking in India

<sup>1</sup>Datta, Sudhangsu, Sekhar. <sup>2</sup>Mukherjee, Kaushik.

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Vidyasagar School of Social Work, Kolkata, West Bengal, India,

<sup>2</sup>Special Educator, Under Banipur C.L.R.C Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (( Paschim Banga Sarva Shiksha Mission), North Parganas, West Bengal,

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**ABSTRACT:** Human trafficking is considered as an alarming issue in the contemporary Indian society. Thousands of women and children are being trafficked from different states as well as brought in from the neighboring countries for the purpose of exploitation. It is an undeniable fact that a large section of the Indian population faces poverty, discrimination and marginalization for numerous reasons which are basically product of faulty policies and social practices. This in turn creates a vulnerable situation which is exploited by the traffickers to maximize profit at the cost of humanitarian values. The Non- Governmental Organizations are working to curb this menace through the intervention of professional social workers. The social workers are playing a pivotal role in different aspect in the prevention of this crime.

This paper tries to explore the current role of the social workers in anti- human trafficking activities. It will also seek to identify how the social workers detect the conditions which may lead to the social malfunctioning often termed as the main reason for trafficking. The paper would highlight the advocacy role as well as the intervention strategies adopted by the social workers in the context of rescue and rehabilitation of the trafficked victims.

**Keywords:** Human trafficking, NGOs, victim, community, intervention

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Date of Submission: 14-12-2017

Date of acceptance: 26-12-2017

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### I. Introduction

Human trafficking has become a global problem with no solution in sight. The developed, developing as well as under developing countries are facing this menace. It is often said and which is quite right that the slavery has returned to haunt the civil societies once again in this new form. It is noticeable that over last few decades number of Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is working at the Global level to address this issue. The involvement of these NGOs can be witnessed even in India. It is true that most the NGOs have limited resources to address this massive problem yet they are engaged in combating the problem of human trafficking which over the years become an alarming problem for the law enforcement bodies. India is facing this problem since it shares the borders with number of countries and most of the borders in the eastern part are porous in nature. The local NGOs have some leverage over the structured , rigid government apparatus regarding local social system. At the micro level, these community based organization is more familiar with the level of poverty, social change and impact of unemployment on the community. These issues ultimately influence the trafficking pattern in a society.

International as well as national NGOs , local community based organizations are working in the field of trafficking where the government mechanisms have miserably failed or failed to produce any substantial results. It is often argued that trafficked women get access to the NGOs sooner than the government officials. The victims often feel inhibition to contact as most of them enter different countries or destination places without any legal documents. They have considerable fear regarding forced deportation, imprisonment, torture and most of the times need to pay bribe to the officials to get preferential treatment. This reluctance often drives them to seek assistance from the NGOs. These NGOs tries to provide the victims social and psychological assistance. They help them to get back to their homes and reintegrate with the society. The vocational training, counseling, legal assistance and documentation for the purpose of repatriation are often done by the NGOs. Under this back drop, this paper intends to highlight the role played by the social workers working in different NGOs to prevent the human trafficking.

### **Contributing Factors To Human Trafficking-**

Human trafficking takes place in every continent and commodification of human bodies continues even after the abolition of the slavery. Even though the activity is considered as crime against humanity, no country is taking the issue as an emergency one. It is pertinent to mention that a section of people always remain vulnerable in every society. They become the easy prey of the traffickers. There is a common belief among the people that trafficking takes place for the purpose of prostitution but according to Monzini (2005) trafficking provides the material for different kinds of labour market. So millions of women and children are becoming the victims of the 'new slave' trade. Newspapers, magazines and television are depicting the realities of exploitations but the relief or the cure is still out of the sight.

The NGO professional tries to look at the vulnerable population and redress the push and pull factors of trafficking. It is important to note that push and pull factors are often complementary (Mishra, 2013). The neo-liberal economic policies followed by the Government in India perpetuates the exploitation of the vulnerable. The liberal economy has created new opportunities for many but simultaneously fuels the unsafe migration and reducing social security for millions. The media has entranced all households irrespective of the economic status. The lure of a good life has created a situation where most of the citizens want to lead a comfortable life. The weak and vulnerable become the victims as they could not anticipate and negotiate the dangers lurked in the apparent opportunities available in the society. It is very hard indeed to stop pull factors as they are considered as the byproduct of the economic development and growth (Mishra, 2013). Push factor like stagnation of economy, employment opportunities, gender inequality, and caste based discrimination and exploitative religious traditions may force the marginalized people to take undue risks for the betterment of life. Departure of a male member may put the female members in the vulnerable situations which are readily exploited by the traffickers. Even after sixty nine years of independence, the administration is not in a position to save millions from the whimsical monsoons and the floods arising out of it. This in turn creates instability and the circumstances ripe for the human trafficking (Hepburn & Simon, 2013). It is mostly found that the trafficked individuals are coming from the families facing debt which generally arise out of drought, flood, crop failure, unstable jobs, and emergencies in lives.

Social exclusion also contributes to the marginalization which ultimately pushes the people to social isolation. The felling of participation in the community life plays a pivotal role in preserving all in a society. The lack of meaningful participation may lead a section of the society to think that they are unwanted. This creates a tension and anxiety among them. Out of desperation, people often take wrong or suicidal decisions. It is very difficult to isolate a factor which is solely responsible human trafficking phenomenon. Rather it is the combination of the factors that pushes an individual to the net of traffickers.

### **Indian Scenario on Human Trafficking-**

The situation in the world so far trafficking is concerned is worsening and it is also applicable for India. Data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that there were 7,647 cases of women being trafficked in 1984 and the figure increased to 11,242 in 2002 (Ghosh and Kar, 2006). The situation further slipped and according to figures placed before the Parliament in March, 2015, 66,865 cases of kidnapping and abduction which includes the human trafficking have been reported across India in 2014 (Chauhan, 2015).

India as a nation is still being used by the traffickers as receiving, sending and transit country. The prostitution has proliferated in various forms all over the country and the existing law on trafficking i.e., The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 which was amended in the 1986, failed to act as a deterrent. The Act tends to link trafficking with the prostitution. But off-late the trend shows that it is found that human beings are trafficked for the purpose of bonded servitude, organ trading, smuggling etc. It is often argued that the Act permits an individual to work as a prostitute at the personal level which is not considered as a crime against law but it has clearly mentioned forced prostitution as a crime in the eye of law. The debate that is going on in the contemporary Indian society is that whether prostitution which lowers the women's dignity can be considered as a personal right to choose to earn money if the women wish. It is an undeniable fact that in India, millions are still tricked or traced from the cities, towns and villages with the intention of exploitation and abuse.

The prevailing social, economic and political conditions are often blamed for the continuation of trafficking. The atrocities on the basis of caste are still very prevalent in different parts of the nation. The Dalit women are extremely vulnerable and their increasing number in the brothels indicates only highlights that they are the victims of trafficking (Shahare, 2014). The economic and political environment is not conducive enough for the women to enjoy human right as human beings. The Constitution and several legislation have been enacted to usher an era of human rights regime. This noble purpose is frustrated every time whenever a woman or child is trafficked. It indicates that the politicians and the policy makers of the nation miserably failed to establish a society for free men and women. When women and children are trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and other reasons, it ultimately violates the Right to life which has been enshrined in the Indian constitution. It is alarming trend that very few numbers of traffickers are prosecuted in the court of law. This

has encouraged thousands to apply the Rational Choice theory to engage in this type of illegal activity. The rational choice theory indicates that human actions are based on the anticipated usefulness which is often reflected through gains and profits. The behavior of the traffickers can be best described as the low risk and high profit endeavor. Lack of gender equality in the Indian society makes the situation more vulnerable for the women. The traffickers consider women as product and believe that they can be exploited or use in any manner ignoring every rights or notion of human rights. Sometimes they are treated even badly than an animal.

#### **Role of Social Workers working in Non-Governmental Organizations in combating Human Trafficking-**

The Human trafficking phenomenon is all pervading and considered as a complex problem in any society at any given point of time. States no matter however powerful or weak could partially address the issue by using the legal and administrative mechanism. Therefore the service of the social workers is much sought after in combating the menace of human trafficking. The social workers in India are actively participating in multifarious activities especially in preventing the problem at the community level, protecting the vulnerable population and prosecuting the perpetrators of this heinous crime. The social workers need to involve in several areas such as rescue of the trafficked victims, restorations, repatriation, reintegration, networking, awareness building, research, documentation, advocacy, training and capacity building (Patkar, 2013)

The approach adopted by the social workers are often appreciated by the common people as they follow right based approach which are generally non threatening, non coercive and non stigmatizing while dealing with the trafficked victims. The involvement of the social workers can be seen at the global, national, community and at individual level. It is pertinent to mention that traffickers are very organized and powerful. They use money power to manipulate the administration and quite efficient to change the recruitment methods of the victims. They allure prospective victims by offering lucrative deals in foreign countries which the victims often fail to resist. The social workers try to address the issue of unsafe migration by roping in the local self-government to introduce the migration register at the Gram panchayat level. They try find out the incidence of debt bondage which are often invisible in nature. The issue of social isolation in different societies and language barrier often create a problem for the control. Psychological imprisonment is an issue which is given much emphasis by the social workers. The social workers believe that human trafficking in a community cannot take place without the knowledge of the local police. But the prevailing corruption makes it a difficult task for the social workers in intervenes on time to prevent the trafficking incidents. It is alarming that parents, relatives and friends are often involved in the network of traffickers. So the social workers in India are focusing more on community policing. This model can be successful only when the "we feeling" value is revived. The spread of globalization in the society leads to such a situation where the concept of individualism rules. Social workers try to disseminate information that none is safe and anybody can be a victim of human trafficking. The task should begin at the lowest and primary level to create awareness among the people. Social Workers are taking up sensitization program and related legal issues for the school children and teachers at the community level so that the children can avoid the trap of the traffickers. Mobile Miking and distribution of leaflets have become important means of spreading awareness in the trafficking prone areas in the hands of social workers. All over the country, the social workers are identifying adolescent girls who face social exclusion in their daily life. They are considered as most vulnerable group to trafficking. The social workers are using the method of group work to create sensitization among these girls. The involvement of parents in any anti-trafficking program. It is regarded as most important. The Indian society still believes that parents are the best protector of the interests of the children. Unfortunately the problem of poverty and other forms of discrimination often force the parents to take a decision for their children who often jeopardize the safety and security of the children. The situation for social workers becomes even more complicated after any natural disasters. In India, continuous flow of women can be witnessed from the neighbouring Himalayan republic Nepal. The villagers of Hills are very poor and traffickers tend to lure them by offering incentives and money. After the devastating earthquake in the recent past, Nepal has become the hunting ground of human traffickers. It is estimated that as many as 5,000-10,000 women and girls are trafficked to India each year (Tiwary, 2015).

Under these trying circumstances, the role of social workers is very crucial. They not only work as watchdog but if needed they become active to prevent the activities of the traffickers. The social workers are involved in both centre based and community based interventions. It is often found out that most of the trafficked women and children are victims of sexual exploitation. So they badly need psychological support along with the provision of safe shelter, medical treatment, food, clothing etc. The social workers in the NGO set up try to provide all the support-material and psychological. They counsel them so that they can overcome the trauma and become optimistic about life. It is true that social stigma is very much associated with the trafficked victims. The society looks towards the victims with suspicion and contempt. This in turn makes it harder for the women who have faced degrading and dehumanizing experiences to come back to the mainstream. If they fail to reintegrate within the society, there is every possibility that they will be re-trafficked in future. Social Workers remain vigilant to ensure smooth reintegration of trafficked victims in their respective community.

## **II. Conclusion**

It is generally observed that social workers are not only involved in the rescue operation along with the police force, their activities continue even after that which includes After-Care, documentation of the cases, prosecution of the traffickers by collating the evidences against traffickers who are arrested or to be arrested. Trafficked victims often don't have legal documents which are generally confiscated by the traffickers and therefore they are afraid to approach the administration for the fear of prosecution. The social workers take up these issues with the government officials on behalf of them. They provide assistance to the trafficked victims to access the state support system.

The NGOs provide conducive atmosphere for the victims to share their experiences and the social workers follow the principle of non-judgmental attitude and understanding to help the victims to air their pent up feeling. The successful intervention largely depends on the creation of trust between the victims and social workers. The social workers also face some challenges which are beyond the control. If the victims want to testify in the court of law against the traffickers, the onus of protection of the victims lies with the State. The social workers prepare the victims for the legal battle but not in a position to safeguard from the vengeance of the traffickers who are often members of the local community. Re-integration of the trafficked victims needs a comprehensive approach. This needs monumental efforts not only from the social workers but also from different stakeholders which includes common people, Government authorities.

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International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 4593, Journal no. 47449.

<sup>1</sup>Datta, Sudhangsu, Sekhar. <sup>2</sup>Mukherjee, Kaushik. "Role played by social workers in Non Governmental Organizations in preventing human trafficking in India." International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 06, no. 12, 2017, pp. 34-37.