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International Sex Trafficking

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ABSTRACT

Sex trafficking is a type of human trafficking that disproportionately affects girls and women. This article describes the scope of international sex trafficking, relying on global comparisons such as the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report and empirical research with survivors in various regions. Although international sex trafficking is often attributed to poverty and underdevelopment alone, it is fostered by a more complex matrix of economic and cultural factors. I analyze trafficking through a feminist perspective, conceptualizing gender as a universal system of social classification that assigns greater power and status to men. Gender intersects with other systems of social dominance, such as caste, tribe, and ethnicity, to produce vulnerable populations of girls and women. To understand why trafficking happens, how to prevent it, and how to care for survivors, it is necessary to understand how the gender system works and how it intersects with other systems of domination/oppression in the particular locale or region of interest. Interventions developed without this understanding are likely to be ineffective or counterproductive. To illustrate the kind of background knowledge that is needed to reduce risk and aid survivors I describe my research on sex trafficking in South Asia. Based on this research, I offer suggestions for reducing risk in vulnerable populations and for aiding survivors. The global problem of sex trafficking can best be addressed by locally informed solutions grounded in feminist theory and practice. Psychology can make important contributions to ending this egregious form of violence against girls and women.

KEYWORDS

Gender inequality; intersectionality; Nepal; sex trafficking; social dominance

A United Nations (UN) Protocol on Trafficking signed by more than 80 nations defines human trafficking as follows:

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation should include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

“Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age. (United Nations, 2000, p. 2)

The UN Protocol acknowledges that people are trafficked for many purposes, including forced labor, organ donation, and sexual exploitation for commercial or personal gain. Trafficking is distinguished from migration, smuggling of persons, and voluntary labor under difficult conditions. The core elements of the Protocol’s definition of human trafficking are *deception* and *coercion*—the use of fraud or force to compel victims into forced labor or servitude (Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women [GAATW], 2000). The Protocol also specifies that children under the age of 18 cannot give legal consent even when no direct coercion or deception is used. Trafficking does not necessarily involve moving the victim from one location to another:

People may be considered trafficking victims regardless of whether they were born into a state of servitude, were transported to the exploitative situation, previously consented to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of being trafficked. At the heart of this phenomenon is the traffickers’ goal of exploiting and enslaving their victims and the myriad coercive and deceptive practices they use to do so. (United States Department of State, 2014)

Coercive tactics of traffickers include threats, abduction, and physical or sexual violence. Moreover, traffickers commonly hold victims in debt bondage: They claim that the victim owes them large amounts of money for recruitment, transport or food and lodging, and must remain in the trafficking situation until the “debt” is paid. Deceptive tactics include recruiting for nonexistent jobs, misrepresenting conditions of employment, promising a marriage, and other forms of psychological manipulation.

Sex trafficking occurs when the victim—female or male, adult or child—is coerced or deceived into sexual exploitation for the purpose of commercial or individual gain. Most often, victims of sex trafficking are girls and women who are forced to work as prostitutes in the commercial sex or adult entertainment industries. However, trafficking also can occur outside commercial settings. For example, when women emigrate from their home countries to find employment as maids in private households, they may then be held under coercive conditions and forced to provide sex to male household members as part of their duties.

When a 16-year-old girl voluntarily leaves her village in Thailand to work as a low-wage maid in a wealthy Saudi household, only to find that her “duties” include sex with the sons of the household, she is a victim of labor exploitation and sex trafficking (Crim, 2010). When a 30-something sex worker leaves

Ukraine to work as a stripper in Israel, she may agree to have paid sex with clients, but then find that she is imprisoned in a brothel, threatened, and beaten, with her passport and wages confiscated by the owners. She has moved from being a voluntary sex worker to being a victim of sex trafficking (Cwikel & Hoban, 2005). An individual may consent to an unfair labor contract, to being smuggled, to engaging in sex work—but if she has not consented to ongoing sexual exploitation for personal or commercial gain, she is a victim of sex trafficking.

Human trafficking—including sex trafficking—is a widespread phenomenon. Worldwide, the International Labour Organization (2012) estimates that 21 million people are trafficked currently, with the Asia-Pacific region accounting for 56%, Africa 18%, and Latin America 9% of cases. Other estimates have ranged up to 27 million (United States Department of State, 2007). The United States Department of State (2014) has recorded that in 2013 there were 44,578 identified victims worldwide, and an estimated 20 million victims overall. All these figures illustrate both the scope of the problem and the difficulty of identifying victims. Human trafficking is estimated to be the third biggest criminal activity worldwide, exceeded only by drug and weapons trafficking (Crawford, 2010; Farr, 2005; Levy, 2008; McCabe & Manian, 2010; Montgomery, 2001), and may be the second largest source of illegal income for organized crime (Nam, 2007).

In this article, I focus on international sex trafficking of girls and women, trafficking in which the victim is moved across an international border. Although international sex trafficking is often attributed to poverty and underdevelopment alone, it is fostered by a more complex matrix of economic and cultural factors. After describing patterns of global prevalence, I analyze trafficking through a feminist perspective, conceptualizing gender as a universal system of social classification that assigns greater power and status to men. The root cause of sex trafficking is gender inequality.

Although it is a global problem (in the sense of occurring in most regions of the globe and across national borders), sex trafficking is not the same everywhere. Instead, we can understand sex trafficking originating in a particular nation or region only by understanding what it means to be female in that nation or region. This conception of sex trafficking can help researchers and clinicians develop locally informed solutions grounded in feminist theory and practice. To illustrate the cultural specificity of sex trafficking and the need for locally based interventions, I briefly describe my research on sex trafficking from Nepal to India (Crawford, 2010, 2014; Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Crawford, Kaufman, & Gurung, 2007; Kaufman & Crawford, 2011).

International Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is not a new phenomenon. In the early part of the twentieth century, the belief that large numbers of white western women were being

abducted into “white slavery” led to worldwide media coverage and the passage of laws and international protocols aimed at ending sex trafficking of European women (Crawford, 2010; Doezema, 1999; Long, 2004). Although historians have rejected the “white slavery” epidemic as a moral panic based on exaggeration, girls and women from less developed regions historically have been at risk for trafficking (Long, 2004). Today, girls and women are trafficked from Ukraine to Israel (Malarek, 2005). They are abducted in South Africa (Mathias & McCabe, 2010); they are transported from Mexico to the United States (Richards, 2010) and Colombia to Japan (Warren, 2007). These girls and women are forced into prostitution. Children from China, Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam are sold into sexual slavery (Carranza & Parada, 2010; Montgomery, 2001; Nguyen, 2010; U.S. Department of State, 2014), and Nepali girls are taken from their villages into the red-light districts of Indian cities, where they are forced into prostitution (Crawford, 2010).

For the latter part of the 20th century, sex trafficking remained underground, largely unreported and under-investigated. Beginning in the 1990s, human trafficking, including sex trafficking, once again became a focus of interest for activists, researchers, and the media. This resurgence of interest may be due to increased concern with human rights violations generally (Human Rights Watch, 1995), increasing attention to women’s health and the effects of various forms of violence against women (Levy, 2008), and concern over the global spread of HIV within the commercial sex industry (Silverman et al., 2014; Steen, Hontelez, Veraart, White, & de Vlas, 2014).

Most nations that are sites of international sex trafficking also are sites of within-country sex trafficking. In Afghanistan, for example, some young girls and women are trafficked from rural areas to Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, whereas others are trafficked no further than to or within the capital, Kabul, where they live out their lives in degradation and exploitation (Bush, 2010). Although sex trafficking disproportionately affects girls and women, it is not always females who are trafficked. Some pedophiles prefer young boys (Bush, 2010; Hussain, 2000). For example, the Philippines is a thriving destination for pedophile sex tours, and the number of child sex rings is believed to have increased steadily since the mid-1980s (Farr, 2005).

Estimating the Prevalence of International Sex Trafficking

There are many reasons why it is difficult to estimate the prevalence of international sex trafficking. It often occurs in tandem with other illegal or ethically dubious practices such as sex tourism, the mail-order bride industry, the pornography business, drug trafficking, and the broader problem of trafficking for labor exploitation. Because it is illegal, it is underground and likely underreported; prosecution is lax in many countries, and convictions represent only a tiny fraction of cases (U.S. Department of State, 2014). More fundamentally,

different anti-trafficking organizations operate from different definitions of what constitutes sex trafficking. Evangelical Christian groups and some feminist organizations (e.g., The Coalition against Trafficking in Women) view prostitution itself as a form of violence against women, with pervasive effects on women's physical and psychological health. They reject the notion that prostitution can be truly consensual, and oppose its legalization or decriminalization (Farley, 2004). In contrast, many women's rights groups, particularly those working from public health or labor rights perspectives, argue for the legalization of commercial sex work so that sex workers can benefit from improved labor conditions. For example, the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW), a coalition of more than 100 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, calls for the participation of sex workers in finding solutions to trafficking (Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women [GAATW], 2011). Even the terminology used by the two camps—sex work versus prostitution—differs, and their widely varying estimates of the scope and prevalence of sex trafficking reflect their incompatible perspectives (Crawford, 2010; Sinha & Dasgupta, 2009).

There are myriad NGOs whose purpose is to address trafficking. In the interest of raising awareness and competing for funds, each makes claims about the tortures of victims and the size of the problem; however, these claims may be unsubstantiated. One scholar has characterized this situation as a “war of numbers,” with anti-trafficking groups claiming “larger and larger numbers of victims, often with very little empirical basis” (Merry, 2013, p. 8). For all these reasons, the prevalence of sex trafficking remains an unknown quantity. What we do know is that women who are most vulnerable to international trafficking are often nonliterate, undocumented, impoverished, or cut off from family networks by war, civil unrest, or migration (Farr, 2005). No one actually knows how many girls and women have disappeared into forced prostitution, their absence unreported to authorities or their records lost in the chaos of war.

The U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report

The United States Department of State annually issues a federally mandated Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. The TIP report is compiled mainly from information provided by U.S. embassies, government officials, and non-governmental and international organizations, supplemented by published reports, news articles, academic studies, and direct research trips. Each year, the TIP Report ranks countries into four “tiers.” Each country's tier placement is based on its standing on the “3 Ps”: prevention of trafficking, protection of trafficking survivors, and prosecution of traffickers. Tier placement is based more on the (estimated) extent of government action to combat trafficking than on the extent of the country's problem (Warren, 2007). Tier One

countries are those that meet minimum standards. Tier Two countries do not meet minimum standards but are making significant efforts to do so; and Tier Three countries are doing little or nothing toward prevention, protection or prosecution. An additional category, the Tier Two Watchlist, includes countries that are in danger of slipping into Tier Three because they have a high absolute rate of trafficking, and/or had an increase in trafficking cases during the past year and are not making significant efforts to address the problem.

The TIP report is a useful but imperfect indicator of the scope of human trafficking. One limitation is that its statistics and rankings are based largely on each country's NGO and governmental reports of its own data. Often, these data cannot be independently verified. Critics charge that a country's tier ranking may have more to do with its strategic importance and its lobbying efforts than its anti-trafficking efforts (Malarek, 2005), and that tier rankings create an illusion of concrete documentation of the prevalence of trafficking (Warren, 2007). Moreover, I would argue that the accuracy of a country's report may be lowest when that country has a trafficking problem that it is unwilling or unable to address. Countries ruled by dictatorship or those engaged in civil unrest or warfare, for example, are unlikely to collect and report accurate data on human trafficking. In nations where women are legally and socially regarded as the property of men, the welfare of girls and women may not hold a high priority for governmental record keeping.

Despite these limitations, the annual TIP report is an important resource. In the 2014 report, only 33 of the world's countries achieved Tier One status. There were 89 countries in Tier Two, ranging from Afghanistan to Zambia. Burma, Cambodia, China and Ukraine were among the 44 nations on the Tier Two Watchlist; and the 23 Tier Three nations, those with intractable problems and no evidence of efforts to change, included North Korea, Iran, and Saudi Arabia (U.S. Department of State, 2014). In the past, South Asian nations consistently have generated the largest number of cases of sex trafficking (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). In the most recent TIP report, no South Asian nation achieved Tier One status; all were classified as either Tier Two or Tier Two Watchlist (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

Source, Destination, and Hub Countries

Nations where trafficking originates are termed *source countries* (Farr, 2005). In general, source countries tend to have high rates of poverty and underdevelopment. However, the burden of poverty is not gender-neutral. In virtually all nations, women work longer hours than men do each day in a combination of paid and unpaid work. Moreover, women in developing countries most often combine paid work with large daily burdens of unpaid labor—housework, shopping for food, cooking, elder care and childcare—done with limited access to technological aids such as electricity and refrigeration. Globally, women do

at least twice as much unpaid labor as men do, and men are nearly twice as likely to have full-time paid jobs (World Bank, 2014a).

Women are more likely to work in the informal labor market—work that is partially or fully outside government regulation, taxation, and observation (World Bank, 2014b), such as sewing garments at home for a manufacturer. In Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the great majority of new jobs are in the informal sector. Unfortunately, because it is “off the books,” this work is often underpaid, totally unregulated, and unreliable (World Bank, 2014b).

Another type of source country is industrialized nations with high unemployment due to economic crisis or rapid social change. The now-independent states of the former Soviet Union, for example, began to transition from socialist to market economies in the 1990s. During this time, women lost formerly secure state-sponsored jobs and the labor market became aggressive, competitive, and corrupt. Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova all are source countries for international sex trafficking. Some, but not all, source countries have powerful organized crime syndicates (Farr, 2005).

In contrast to source countries, destination countries for international sex trafficking tend to be relatively affluent. Compared to the developing or transitional countries from which women are trafficked, they appear to provide opportunity for economic and social mobility, which appeals to women who want a better life and are willing to migrate to achieve it. Western countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland and Germany all are destination countries for sex trafficking.

Modes and Methods of International Trafficking

The main mode of international sex trafficking is the promise of employment. A contractor or broker offers employment in a foreign city to a woman who is struggling to support herself (and perhaps her extended family). Affluent countries often have a strong demand for female domestic labor, and affluent Middle Eastern states such as Qatar and Kuwait are destination countries in that region. The house cleaners, cooks, and caregivers for the elderly who prop up wealthy households in affluent countries often are recruited from poorer countries, and they may be economically and sexually exploited after they are under the control of the employer (Crim, 2010; Farr, 2005). Traffickers may also promise lucrative employment in the adult entertainment or service industries—employment as waitresses, massage therapists, strippers, bartenders, dancers, models, and so on. Some women are trafficked after they agree to migrate to do sex work. In sum, traffickers exploit women who need to find employment and have few marketable skills or opportunities in their home countries. Two studies of survivors, both in South Asia, demonstrate the primacy of deceptive employment offers in international trafficking. They

found, respectively, that 63% of survivors (Hennick & Simkhada, 2004) and 50% of survivors (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008) had been trafficked by job offers. Although there has been no systematic research on women's motivations or behavior that may put them at risk, this pattern suggests that, tragically, girls and women who are most agentic, ambitious, and eager to strive for a better life are most vulnerable to being trafficked.

Some areas are *hubs*, or centers for buying, selling, and transport of girls and women. Hub countries typically have a large organized commercial sex industry, particularly in the capital city (e.g., Bangkok, Thailand), and are venues for international sex tourism. Multinational traffickers bring girls and women to these sex markets, where they may be sold and moved on to another country or assimilated into the local sex industry. Another characteristic of hubs is control of the sex market by powerful crime syndicates (Nigeria, India, and Mexico are examples). Often, traffickers use the same routes to transport women, drugs and weapons (Warren, 2007).

Patterns of international sex trafficking reflect the complex influence of globalization and economic inequality. As international borders have become more porous, citizens of poor countries migrate in search of work, while citizens of wealthy ones travel for recreation, including sex tourism and sexual access to young children (Farr, 2005; Montgomery, 2001). However, patterns of relative affluence are not the only drivers of the trafficking trade. Patterns of gender inequality are even more fundamental. Women who live in a climate of gender inequality in their home countries, limiting their choices and opportunities, are at risk for trafficking as they seek a better way of life. I will return to the central role of gender inequality and sex discrimination in sex trafficking after describing the effects of trafficking on its victims.

Consequences for the Victims

Sex trafficking is a devastating form of violence against girls and women. Survivors' testimony, recorded by governmental agencies, NGOs and human rights advocacy groups, describes extreme physical and sexual violence, leading to significant detriments to physical health and psychological adjustment (Frederick & Kelly, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1995; Malarek, 2005; Terre des Hommes, 2005). Yet there is very little systematic research on sex trafficking and its consequences (Crawford, 2010; Oram, Stöckl, Busza, Howard, & Zimmerman, 2012). Research studies, though limited in number, scope, and methodological rigor, suggest that the immediate and long-term physical consequences of trafficking are severe. For example, 95% of sex-trafficked women have experienced sexual violence (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Nearly two-thirds report 10 or more physical symptoms that persist after they exit the trafficking situation. These include chronic headaches, fatigue, dizziness, back pain, and memory problems.

Tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections are common in trafficked girls and women and in survivors. Only four studies, all conducted in Nepal or India, have systematically measured HIV/AIDS incidence in trafficked girls and women. Across the four studies, the pooled rate of HIV infection was 32% (Oram et al., 2012).

Sexually uninitiated girls have a high value to traffickers. “Virgin-selling” is a common practice in some Cambodian villages (U.S. Department of State, 2014), and, in many parts of the world, the belief is prevalent that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS (Mathias & McCabe, 2010; Sen & Nair, 2005). These practices and beliefs contribute to greater trafficking risk, and therefore greater HIV risk, for young girls. The empirically documented higher HIV risk factor for younger girls is likely due to their greater biological susceptibility, longer duration in the trafficking situation, and high market value for brothel owners, who exploit their youth and attractiveness, forcing them to have sex with a large number of clients (Silverman et al., 2007).

The mental health impact of trafficking is devastating. Despite the obvious risk to trafficking victims, there are few peer-reviewed studies that assess mental health consequences of sex trafficking. Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, and Watts (2010), using the Brief Symptom Inventory, found a 48% rate of anxiety in a sample of 204 survivors from Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Moldova, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. In the only study to date that directly compares trafficked and non-trafficked sex workers, Cwikel, Chudakov, Paikin, Agmon, and Belmaker (2004) used questionnaire measures of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with a sample of 102 women illegally working in Israeli brothels. Trafficked women had higher rates of both depression (57%) and PTSD (20%) than non-trafficked women (29% and 14%, respectively). Despite less-than-optimal measurement instruments in some studies and the small number of studies overall, it is clear that trafficked women often experience significant psychological consequences that persist after they exit from the trafficking situation. Across the four studies reviewed by Oram and colleagues (2012), all of which used screening instruments to assess psychological distress, there were very high rates of anxiety (48%–98%), depression (55%–100%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (19%–77%) in survivors.

Gender Inequality and Sex Trafficking

Poverty and geography alone cannot explain why girls and women are sold into brothels and forced to endure grim lives of sexual slavery. To explain why girls and women around the globe are vulnerable to sex trafficking, it is necessary to employ theoretical approaches and empirical methods grounded in feminist research on women and gender.

Global Patterns of Gender Inequality

In every known society, the social categories male and female are linked to an individual's social roles, power, status, and access to resources. Gender inequality is a global reality; men have more status, power and control than women do in most societies, to a greater or lesser degree. Gender inequality can be assessed empirically by using any of several macro-level measures (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012). For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) calculates a Gender Inequality Index (GII), a composite of statistical information on three key aspects of gender inequality: women's reproductive health (e.g., maternal death rates, access to reproductive health care), their participation in the paid labor force, and their empowerment. One of the measures used to compile the empowerment scale of the GII is the percentage of members of the national parliament who are women. Because women are about half the population, gender equity would be reflected in parliaments or congresses that are 50% female (Sweden comes closest to parity, with women's participation in national governance at 45%). Source countries for sex trafficking typically score very low on the GII and similar macro-level measures of women's status and well-being (Crawford, 2014; Farr, 2005).

Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) provides a relevant theoretical analysis of how the gender system works to maintain the greater status and power of men. From the perspective of this theory, global gender inequality is created and maintained by three broad forms of gender devaluation and discrimination: overt violence against girls and women; denying girls and women access to resources; and consensual ideologies of masculinity and femininity that are deployed to justify the subordination of girls and women (Pratto & Walker, 2004). These forms of gender-linked subordination have been observed in many societies, although their specific details vary widely. Coercive control, inequitable allocation of resources, and consensual ideologies are linked and mutually reinforcing. They work together to maintain the higher status and power of boys and men and to limit the options for girls and women.

Intersectionality

Although gender is a universal system of social classification, it is not the only social system that is linked to power and status. Feminist theorists use the term *intersectionality* to denote that each individual may have many identities and social locations, and thus simultaneously experience privilege and oppression (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007). As a theoretical construct, intersectionality emerged from the work of feminists of color, who realized that a focus on race *or* gender *or* social class *or* sexuality was insufficient to

capture their lived experiences. Applied in a global context, feminist theories of gender and intersectionality can help explain how gender and other dimensions of difference are institutionalized and enacted not only in Western industrialized societies, but also in diverse other societies.

Gender intersects with other systems of social dominance, such as caste, tribe, and ethnicity, to produce vulnerable populations of girls and women. To understand why trafficking happens, how to prevent it, and how to care for survivors, it is necessary to understand how the gender system works, and how it interacts with other systems of domination/oppression, in the particular locale or region of interest. Interventions developed without this understanding are likely to be ineffective or even counterproductive (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011).

Analyzing gender as a complex system of social classification that governs power, status, and access to resources helps in understanding why sex trafficking occurs at particular times and places. Using the principle of intersectionality helps in understanding why some girls and women are more vulnerable than others are.

Although sex trafficking is global in scope, it is best to analyze it in its local contexts. For example, although poverty usually is a factor in sex trafficking, it is not the sole cause, and the cultural forces underlying women's poverty are not the same in Nepal as Serbia, Thailand, South Africa, or the United States. To attribute sex trafficking to poverty alone is simplistic. Instead, we should ask about the gender context of trafficking in a particular society: What are the cultural beliefs about women? How are their opportunities curtailed? How are they discriminated against or oppressed? In addition, we should ask about the intersections of other systems of power and oppression in that society, whether they are caste, tribe, immigrant status, racial group, or minority ethnic identity.

To illustrate the kind of background knowledge that is needed to reduce risk, protect and heal survivors, and prosecute traffickers, I will briefly describe my research on sex trafficking in South Asia, the region where it has been most prevalent (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). My work focuses on trafficking from Nepal, an extremely poor and underdeveloped source country, to India (Crawford, 2010; Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Crawford et al., 2007; Kaufman & Crawford, 2011).

Sex Trafficking in Nepal

Within Nepal, trafficking originates from rural areas of Nepal into the capital city of Kathmandu, where massage parlors, dance bars, and “cabin restaurants” are sites of prostitution and the exploitation of girls and women. According to Nepali authorities, this kind of in-country trafficking is increasing steadily (Crawford, 2010). Moreover, Nepal is a source country for direct trafficking

to India, a destination and hub country. In Indian cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, brothel districts thrive, and young Nepali girls are prized commodities.

Nepal as a Source Country

Nepal is one of the world's poorest countries. The UN Human Development Programme ranks it 157th among 187 countries on development (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011). Unlike its nearest neighbors, India and China, it is not a major force in international politics. To Westerners, it often seems a legendary and remote land, the site of mountaineering exploits. Nepal was in fact relatively inaccessible to Westerners until the 1960s, because its autocratic ruling families had restricted entry for generations after its feudal kingdoms were united into a nation. It was not until 1951, after a long-delayed democratic revolution, that Nepal established a constitutional monarchy and began to open the country to foreign visitors. Wealthy tourists began to arrive, followed by large numbers of young people looking for adventure, spiritual enlightenment, and drugs. By the 1960s, Kathmandu was a counterculture haven (Liechty, 2005).

Although Nepal is a nation, its ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity create challenges for its unity as a national entity. There are many ethnic and caste groups, located in three distinct geographical zones: the Terai, or lowland plains bordering northern India; the Kathmandu Valley; and the hill regions. The majority religion is Hinduism, with about 80% of the population as adherents; Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and indigenous animistic religions are also represented. Ethnic/caste groups are aggregated into four sub-groups: the Hindu caste elite (Brahmin and Chhettri); the indigenous ethnic groups (Sherpa, Magar, Gurung, and about 60 others); the regional groups of the Terai; and the Dalit, traditionally the "untouchables" of the Hindu caste system. The indigenous people of Nepal speak more than a hundred different languages (Lawoti, 2007a).

Within Nepal, as in much of South Asia, the most important system of social classification other than gender is caste. Caste-linked inequities in material resources and social status are ubiquitous, although the caste system was abolished by law in the 1960s. Upper-caste Hindus, at about 30% of the population, occupy 70% of the positions of societal power as leaders of political parties, members of the national parliament, officials in the judicial system, leaders in local and regional government, faculties of the universities, and journalists and owners of the media. At the other end of the social spectrum, 80% of Dalits, the former untouchables, live below the poverty line (Crawford, 2010; Lawoti, 2007b).

In the decade between 1996 and 2006, the Nepalese people lived in the midst of a Maoist insurgency that further increased poverty and hardship

for many, particularly those in rural areas. Many disadvantaged citizens who resented the inequitable distribution of wealth and the pervasive corruption among police, government officials, and the judicial system supported the insurgency. However, tourism and the influx of foreign development aid both decreased dramatically, leading to an economic crisis. In addition to high rates of unemployment, Nepalis in the Kathmandu Valley experienced shortages of cooking fuel, power outages and blackouts, strikes, violent demonstrations, and being caught between the Royal Army and the Maoists.

In rural areas, schools closed, because teachers were murdered by the Maoists or escaped to the city. Agriculture, the major source of sustenance for the rural majority, was disrupted. Often, the Maoists would occupy a rural village, taking stored food supplies, burning houses, and terrifying the villagers. They also demanded that each household provide a recruit for the Maoist cadres. After the Maoists left, the Royal Army would arrive and accuse villagers of collaborating with the enemy, and commit their own atrocities (Crawford, 2010; Crawford et al., 2007). The insurgency caused displacement of unknown numbers of rural people and increased migration, both of which are linked to increased risk of trafficking.

Both sides in the conflict engaged in human rights violations including torture, rape, and murders of civilians. Disappearances were common; the Royal Army used “preventive detention” and the Maoists used forced recruitment. The insurgency brought physical and psychological trauma to many Nepali families (Crawford, 2010; Crawford et al., 2007).

In 2006, after a decade of war, the rebel leader became the world’s first democratically elected Maoist prime minister and a Constitutional Assembly was convened to draft a new constitution (Lawoti, 2007a). Unfortunately, that process did not go well, and Nepal was without a constitution for a decade.

Poverty, civil war, and political instability all help create a climate where human trafficking is likely to take place. However, the most important causal factor in sex trafficking in Nepal is as old as the country itself: the low status of girls and women.

Gender in Nepal

I will describe the social construction of gender in Nepal with respect to the three categories used by Pratto and Walker (2004) to describe the gender system: violence against girls and women; denial of access to resources; and ideologies that justify the subordination of women.

Violence Against Girls and Women in Nepal

Gender-linked violence is pervasive in Nepal. Wife beating is a normal feature of village life, according to anthropologists, and need not be explained or

justified (Bennett, 1983; Cameron, 1998). There are no reliable statistics on rape rates, but Nepali women who work for women's rights in rural areas report that it is common, that the victim is rarely believed, and that the standard remedy for an alleged rape is to arrange a marriage between rapist and victim (Crawford, 2010). Marital rape is accepted as part of life. A study of married women in Kathmandu reported a 49% rate of marital rape—that is, virtually half of the women had been forced to have sex against their will (Puri, Tamang, & Shah, 2011). Trafficking is part of a larger social acceptance of violence against girls and women.

Resource Control

When the men in a society control more than a fair share of its valued resources, women are disadvantaged and have less access to power. In Nepal, women have little control of resources and little power in the public sphere. Even their right to citizenship historically has been determined solely by the father's acknowledgement of paternity. Educational opportunity is another crucial resource. Nepali girls often are denied equal access to education; historically, there has been a nationwide gender gap in school enrollment, and it has been larger in rural areas (Poudel & Carryer, 2000; Sibbons, 1998). The result is that, among Nepali adults, the literacy rate for women remains significantly lower than for men. Lack of education curtails women's opportunity to contribute to society. For example, virtually all political leaders in Nepal are high-caste men.

Consensual Ideologies of Gender

Every known society has beliefs about the fundamental natures of women and men, beliefs that justify their particular system of gender discrimination. Consensual ideologies of gender make gender inequality seem “only natural,” morally justifiable, and right. In Nepal, the preference for sons is a consensual ideology, and it is justified both by religious dogma and everyday patterns of living. In the Hindu religion, sons are expected to care for their parents in old age and only sons can perform death rites for their parents. Having at least one son is therefore a practical necessity and a significant religious duty. Having a daughter, on the other hand, is less of a blessing and more of a liability. Upon marriage, virtually all Nepali girls move to the house of their husband's parents, and their work in the household or in a paid job benefits their husband's family. Poor rural families may be unwilling to invest in supporting and educating a daughter. Given the hard economic choices families face, parents in rural areas may send daughters to the city to work as servants in wealthy homes, or arrange marriages even before the girls reach puberty. For girls, early marriage leads to significant risks to physical and psychological well-being. It ends their schooling, separates them from their network of family and neighbors, puts them at risk for pregnancy and childbirth in their

early teens, leaves them vulnerable to beatings and marital rape, and increases their risk of being trafficked (Crawford, 2010).

Another aspect of the consensual ideology of gender in Nepal is the belief, based in Hinduism, that women's sexuality is dangerous and disruptive to men's spirituality (Bennett, 1983). Traditional religious rites enact the beliefs that women should be subordinate to their husbands and that women's bodies are a source of dangerous pollution for men. Although these customs are loosening with modernization, Nepali women who come from urban, educated families still report that they must observe rituals to control the supposed pollution of the female body, and these restrictions create dilemmas in their busy lives of work and family responsibilities (Crawford, Menger, & Kaufman, 2014). When negative beliefs about female sexuality are deeply rooted in culture, it is easy to stereotype trafficked women in terms of their sexuality and to blame the victim when sexual exploitation and abuse occur.

Gender, caste, and economic disadvantage are linked and mutually reinforcing in Nepal. Families, particularly those who are poor or from disadvantaged caste or ethnic groups, may be unwilling to invest in educating a daughter because they believe that she is less worthy than a son (a consensual ideology). They know that the fruits of her labor will go to her husband's, not her natal, family (culturally specific resource allocation), whereas an adult son's labor continues to benefit his family of origin, as adult sons and their wives usually live with his family. If a girl resists, demanding to stay in school or refusing a child marriage, her family can arrange a marriage, perhaps to a much older man, and send her to live in his village, where she may be beaten or abused if she does not submit to her husband's and in-laws' demands (coercive power). Thus, pervasive and effective systems of social control intersect to disadvantage girls and women (Bennett, 1983; Cameron, 1998; Crawford, 2010).

The case of Maya, a low-caste girl from rural Nepal, illustrates the confluence of factors that disadvantage girls in Nepal (Crawford, 2014). (Although this is an actual case, I have changed the name and details to protect the victim's privacy). Maya's parents took her out of school at an early age in order to provide domestic labor. Her life was hard: daily tasks included gathering and carrying fodder for the family's water buffalo, caring for her younger brother and two sisters while their parents worked as tenant farmers, and helping with cooking. At thirteen, Maya overheard her parents talking about arranging a marriage for her with Lal, a man in his forties who already had a wife. Maya did not like Lal and did not want to move from her home to his village, where she would have to obey his mother and his other wife.

When a prosperous-looking woman arrived in Maya's village and offered to take girls to India for employment in hotels, Maya and her family were intrigued. Working as a maid or dishwasher in Delhi, Maya could earn cash that her family needed desperately. The woman had stories to tell of girls

whose families had been able to afford a new roof or a pair of goats from the earnings their daughters sent home.

Maya and her parents made a tragic mistake when they agreed to this plan. The woman took Maya and several other girls across the border and handed them over to an agent for a brothel in Mumbai. Maya was held captive in a foreign country where she could not speak the language and had no resources for aid. She was beaten and raped into submission, then held in debt bondage and forced to work as a prostitute in the infamous brothel district of Mumbai. Maya was a victim of sex trafficking.

Maya's story is typical of what happens in the sex trafficking trade from Nepal to India: poor, uneducated, and unhappy with life in her village, she was deceived by the promise of paid employment. A report by the international human rights organization *Terre des Hommes* (2005) found hundreds of underage Nepali girls in the brothels of Mumbai and Kolkata, all of whom had been trafficked. Maya's young age and her family's naiveté make her story particularly compelling. However, the victims of international trafficking are diverse in national origin, age, marital status, ethnicity and worldly sophistication. The typical pattern for Nepal differs from the typical pattern for other countries in the average age of victims, their work histories, the traffickers' methods, and so on (Farr, 2005; McCabe & Manian, 2010). There is truly no prototypical victim, despite the fact that some NGOs seek to increase donations by portraying all victims of international trafficking as extremely young, innocent, and virginal (Crawford, 2010).

Psychological Theory and Practice Can Help Prevent Sex Trafficking

Because it disproportionately affects girls and women, sex trafficking may be less visible than other kinds of violence. A parallel is the state of public and psychological knowledge about rape, domestic violence, and sexual abuse 35 years ago, before feminist research and activism drew attention to these forms of gender-linked violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Levy, 2008; Sanday, 1981). At the time, there was little awareness of the scope of these problems, a lack of good data on their prevalence, a dearth of theoretical approaches, and few measurement instruments for assessment. Due to these gaps in knowledge, psychology had not yet developed paradigmatic research methods or begun to devise interventions to prevent the violence and aid survivors. Today, there is a vast corpus of research on rape, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. Sex trafficking is now recognized as another egregious form of gender-linked violence, but psychological resources are not yet well developed.

Psychological organizations, academic venues, and individual psychologists can help raise awareness about modern-day slavery. A first step is to relinquish the belief that it is rare or "it doesn't happen here." Whether an individual is

vacationing in Thailand or Croatia, or at home in the United States, sex trafficking, although hidden from view, may be occurring nearby. Because sex trafficking is an underground criminal activity, a country or region may have a longstanding problem that few people know about and even fewer talk about.

Educational efforts are underway. A Task Force of APA's Division 35, the Society for the Psychology of Women [SPW] (2011), has produced an educational video, *The Psychology of Modern Day Slavery*. APA's Public Interest Directorate has convened a Task Force on the Trafficking of Women and Girls. Its report (APA Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls, 2014) contains extensive suggestions for how psychologists can contribute to ending sex trafficking. Areas for potential contributions from psychology include educational efforts for raising awareness, developing and evaluating interventions, and providing counseling and therapy to survivors.

Risk-Reduction Interventions

As I have noted, sex trafficking is most prevalent in regions with high poverty, low development, and governments that are less than fully functional and accountable to their citizens. For all these reasons, governmental agencies in Tier Two and Tier Three countries often are not the best resources for change (U.S. Department of State, 2014), and the development of interventions to reduce risk in vulnerable populations is often sponsored by NGOs rather than governmental bodies. In Nepal, for example, several NGOs founded and administered by Nepali women are actively working to eliminate sex trafficking. They offer shelter, counseling and reintegration for survivors in hostels where women can reside as long as they need. Typically, these shelters also provide services for victims of other forms of gender-linked abuse, such as rape, widow abuse, and abandonment of girl children. Some NGOs have outposts in border areas and regions with high rates of trafficking. For at-risk women, NGOs provide leadership and human rights training, trafficking awareness programs, HIV/AIDS education and prevention programming, and employment training (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011).

These efforts are admirable, particularly since women's advocates usually do them with few resources and much dedication. However, they are methodologically unsophisticated and rarely permit systematic assessment of their efficacy. For example, many NGO-sponsored educational interventions in developing countries lack an evaluation component. The intervention team may measure the success of an intervention by how many villagers attended the session, or how many booklets were distributed, rather than with pre-post measures of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or behavior. Some interventions may actually be counter-productive; in Nepal, I heard of rural families who took their daughters out of school after an NGO-sponsored community education

intervention convinced them that it was unsafe to let girls leave the family compound. Other interventions may simply have no effect at all—a waste of precious resources. Meaningful intervention evaluation should be included in all programs sponsored by international NGOs, and granting agencies need to demand it as part of any program they sponsor.

Another much-needed methodological approach is to develop effective educational methods for populations that are not literate and/or have little access to electronic media, not just in Nepal but also in other developing countries. One potentially effective tactic is to use community educators to train local women in high-risk areas to conduct anti-trafficking workshops. This approach aims to empower the women who become educators at the same time as it uses local resources to educate rural families about trafficking. Although promising, this approach cannot be assumed effective; systematic evaluation is needed to determine whether it changes knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behavior in at-risk girls and women and their families.

Aiding Survivors of Trafficking

Survivors of international trafficking are in need of many things: a safe place to stay, trauma counseling, medical care, education or vocational training, legal support, and possibly help in returning to their home country. A survivor is likely to be depressed and to blame herself for what happened to her. She is also very much alone in the world, cut off from family and home, and stigmatized by others. Likely, she has learned to trust no one. The survivor's goals for her future depend on whether her family will accept her, whether returning to her native country is an option, and the state of her physical and psychological health. It may be months or years before she is well enough to live independently.

Some NGOs in developing countries claim to rescue and rehabilitate literally thousands of girls and women each year, but provide little empirical evidence for these claims. How effective are rehabilitation efforts globally for survivors of sex trafficking? Unfortunately, the answer to that question is unclear, because there are virtually no systematic studies of long-term outcomes for trafficking survivors. Many NGOs do not have the resources to track survivors after they leave a shelter. Oram and colleagues' (2012) review of peer-reviewed research with populations of survivors showed, as might be expected, that experiences of physical or sexual violence and duration of the trafficking situation were positively related to subsequent psychological disorder. There is a need for more research on survivors' psychological adjustment and long-term outcomes.

What can psychologists do toward helping survivors? They can develop and validate instruments to assess physical and sexual violence and mental health in samples of trafficked women and make them available to governmental

agencies and NGOs. They can examine the impact of physical and psychological abuse and subsequent health problems on post-rescue readjustment. They can study coping and resilience in survivors, and conduct long-term studies of predictors of adjustment. Finally, those with clinical and counseling expertise can develop guidelines for psychological therapy with trafficking survivors. In sum, there are many ways that individual psychologists and psychological organizations can work to eliminate sex trafficking. It is not a hopeless cause. The courage and resilience of trafficking survivors can inspire us to act.

Maya's story illustrates both her personal strength in the face of trauma and the vital importance of providing aid to trafficking survivors. Maya escaped the brothel after two long years when Indian police raided the brothel district and found more than 200 underage Nepali girls, all of whom had been trafficked (Fujikura, 2001). After a long delay in a detention home, 15-year-old Maya returned to Kathmandu in the custody of an NGO. There, she began the slow process of returning to normal life. Maya suffered from depression, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness. She had severe physical problems including a skin disease and chronic abdominal pain. The NGO provided her with shelter, schooling, basic medical care, rudimentary psychological counseling, and a community of other rescued girls and women. Today, years after her rescue, Maya is a healthy, poised woman who works in the office of a women's rights NGO. She has established contact with her family, but does not intend to return to her natal village. She has not married. Maya still finds it difficult to talk about her ordeal in the brothel.

Maya survived; others do not. No one knows how many Nepali girls' lives have ended in the brothels of Mumbai or Kolkata, or how many girls and women around the world have been exploited by traffickers. Sex trafficking, like other forms of violence against girls and women, is a complex phenomenon that varies across cultures, nationalities, and ethnic/racial groups. It is often, but not always, linked to poverty. It is closely linked to gender inequality and social dominance based on gender, which disadvantages girls and women through resource control, coercive power, and consensual ideologies. It intersects with other systems of social dominance such as caste and ethnicity. Ultimately, sex trafficking will end only when women achieve political and social equality across the globe, and gender is no longer a system of social dominance.

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