



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN

Arpita Bera

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

Independent Researcher,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:

Arpita Bera

Abstract

In this era, the progress of a society never waits for anyone. It is a continuous process to improve every aspect of society, and this progress can only be achieved through the quality of education. In this epoch, the relevance of the saying remains that education is the key to a healthy society. Human beings are suffering from various challenges that reduce their positive and concerned manner towards society. We all know that the world is not a perfect place and never will be, but the vision of the 21st century points toward a new world that opens a path of light through technological advancement, development of human resources, discoveries of science, skills enhancement, creativity, innovation, enthusiasm, progressive thinking, and the desire to create something new, something extraordinary. However, women continue to be undervalued in the country as violence and exploitation increase in our daily lives. From this vantage point, our country is stumbling rather than progressing toward becoming a safe and dignified country for women. Women are not safe and secure because the system of the nation is not sufficiently concerned about torture against women, and although various policies are being made by the government to address the social problems of harassment of women mentally and physically, the truth is that we are not taking the issue seriously enough. Consequently, the existence of rapists and molesters is not stamped out. The contemporary landscape of exploitation has further shifted towards digital spaces, necessitating a more robust legal and social framework (UNODC, 2024). The major findings show that there is a critical need to spread awareness regarding sexual violence and women's trafficking. This awareness is necessary for the prevention of this type of social problem. The present article aims to raise public awareness about how to prevent the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and assist mentally and physically abused women in reintegrating into society in order to build a sustainable future for all.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260402103>

Keywords: *Sexual exploitation, trafficking, prevention, self-sufficiency, women, cyber-trafficking*

Introduction

In an era when sexual violence is widespread in the world, such violence increases the risk of suicide, various infections (HIV/AIDS, Chancroid, Chlamydia, genital warts, gonorrhoea), and long-term impacts on physical and mental health. In its 2002 World Report on Violence and Health, the WHO (2002) described sexual violence as encompassing any sexual act or attempt to obtain one, unwelcome sexual comments or advances, and trafficking acts. This includes any conduct targeting a person's sexuality through coercion, perpetrated by anyone, irrespective of their relationship with the victim, in any environment such as the home or workplace. This broad definition establishes a clear link between sexual violence and the act of trafficking for sexual purposes, highlighting that both are expressions of coercion and abuse of power. Currently, people are experiencing depression, sadness, and bitterness as their sources of financial income are narrowed due to COVID-19. In these confined living conditions, the prevalence of sexual exploitation has also greatly increased. Furthermore, poverty is pushing millions of women towards sexual exploitation through child marriage, child labour, and sexual abuse (Sharma, 2015). A woman may be physically forced to have sexual intercourse when she does not want to, or may engage in sexual intercourse out of fear of what her partner might do, or may be forced to do something sexual that she finds degrading or humiliating. In short, sexual exploitation is forcing a person to do sexual acts against their will. The motivation for sexual exploitation may sometimes be personal gratification, sometimes greed, and sometimes it is driven by a person looking for money. Sometimes, for the sake of livelihood, women are subjected to sexual exploitation. Miya Kado and Li (2018) conducted an empirical study on 1,116 secondary-level adolescent students in Tanzania. They revealed that 21 percent of the surveyed adolescent students had had at least one experience of sexual exploitation. Being female, living in rural areas, and being aged above 15 years were associated with a high risk of sexual

exploitation. Recent data suggests that the "digital recruitment" of victims via social media platforms has increased by nearly 30% globally, complicating traditional rescue efforts (Walk Free, 2023).

From the past to the present modern era, the vulnerability of women to trafficking is increasing gradually. Women's trafficking is a severe form of human trafficking and can be described as modern-day slavery. In the rest of the developed world, it is recognized as a crime, just like sexual violence—it is human exploitation through coercion, torture, and threats to kill. The primary purpose of trafficking is sexual exploitation or labour exploitation; it also includes forced marriage, begging, organ trade, debt bondage, and illicit adoption. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2004), human trafficking comes under the category of transnational crime, plaguing nations and pushing them towards illicit outcomes. According to the Palermo Protocol (UNODC, 2004), human trafficking involves recruiting, moving, transferring, harbouring, or receiving individuals through force, threats, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of authority, or exploitation of vulnerability. It also includes providing or receiving payments to gain control over a person for exploitative purposes, such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, or organ removal.

Objectives of the Present Article: The purposes of the present article are:

1. To create and spread public awareness about sexual exploitation and human trafficking of women.
2. To develop a clear understanding of the interconnected causes and consequences of sexual exploitation and trafficking of women.
3. To educate people about various evidence-based strategies to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking and to support survivors.

Sources of Data

The present article is based on secondary data only. The data was gathered from various online news articles, academic journals, and magazines. A search of databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar was conducted using keywords including "sexual exploitation," "women trafficking," "prevention strategies," and "WHO RESPECT framework" to identify relevant, peer-reviewed literature and policy documents.

Causes of Sexual Violence and Women's Trafficking

The article identifies various interconnected causes of sexual violence and women's trafficking, which are discussed below:

1. Lack of Awareness and Illiteracy: A lack of awareness and illiteracy can increase women's vulnerability to trafficking and sexual violence. Unaware women are more easily trafficked when they are outside their homes. While the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21) indicates an improvement in female literacy to 71.5%, the gap in rural-urban awareness remains a significant risk factor (IIPS, 2021). In India, the overall literacy rate is 74.04 per cent, but female literacy is only 65.46 per cent, compared to 82.14 per cent among males (Census of India, 2011). This significant gender gap in literacy directly contributes to a lack of knowledge about rights and risks.

2. Lack of Education: Lack of formal education is a major cause of women's trafficking and sexual assault. Women are not getting equal opportunities and earning power due to a lack of proper education and the consequent lack of knowledge about constitutional provisions for women's rights. Because of this, victims often cannot file complaints or use government protection mechanisms to protect themselves.

3. Poverty and Unemployment: Poverty and unemployment are major drivers of women's trafficking. In a poor family, some parents may be coerced or deceived into selling their children to traffickers in India and abroad. Those without jobs are also more susceptible to deceptive offers of employment. On the other hand, deeply embedded gender discrimination is a foundational part of both sexual violence and women's trafficking, normalizing the exploitation of women and girls.

4. Lack of Health and Sex Education: A lack of health and sex education can lead to increased vulnerability to trafficking. Allenam and Poulton (2018) argue that comprehensive health education holds the same significance as sexual awareness in preventing sexual violence.

5. Technological Vulnerability: The rapid digitization of communication has introduced "cyber-trafficking," where traffickers use anonymous platforms to groom victims through fraudulent job offers or emotional manipulation (Interpol, 2024). This technological shift requires a corresponding evolution in digital literacy for women. Apart from these, there are some other systemic causes of sexual exploitation and women's trafficking:

- (i) A moral void and a weakened social and ethical perspective in society.
- (ii) Economic and social backwardness of specific communities and regions.
- (iii) A lack of resources to address the problem of women's trafficking effectively.
- (iv) A widespread lack of understanding of legal rights among vulnerable populations.

Prevention and Strategies

A safe and empowering environment is fundamental for the protection of women. A protective environment is one that is both safe and empowering. Any type of harassment against women occurring in public places, streets around public transportation, schools, workspaces, public toilets, parks, and markets limits women's freedom of movement. Therefore, we must all take the responsibility to raise our voices against violence against women and listen to what they have to say. A protective environment

for women requires access to essential services and a response plan by the government to ensure the safety of all women living in rural and urban areas with security.

Spreading Awareness: Because of a lack of awareness, sexual violence and women's trafficking are occurring every day. When people are not aware of what is wrong and what is right for them and their society, they may perpetrate such criminal activities, and sometimes they suffer as a father of a daughter, as a family member of a girl, or as a brother or sister of someone who is sexually assaulted. If women are made aware of the realities of sexual assault and trafficking, they have the required knowledge and incentive to protect themselves when they are out of the home. Therefore, spreading awareness among all people can decrease criminal activity against women.

Making Strategies: Developing and implementing strategies to prevent sexual violence and women's trafficking is a necessary part of a sustainable solution. Guidelines, strategy implementation, and planning can help eliminate unexpected and unwelcome situations from our daily lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women, with endorsement from 12 other UN and bilateral agencies, published the "RESPECT Women" framework for preventing violence against women, aimed at policymakers (WHO, 2019). Each letter in RESPECT stands for one of seven evidence-based strategies:

R = Relationship skills strengthening.

E = Empowerment of women.

S = Services ensured.

P = Poverty reduced.

E = Enabling environments (schools, workplaces, public spaces) created.

C = Prevention of abuse against children and adolescents.

T = Transformation of societal attitudes, cultural beliefs, and social norms.

These interconnected strategies work together to teach women various skills for self-defense in unwanted situations, provide economic and social opportunities, and build society's support system for women as a fundamental strategy to prevent sexual assault and women's trafficking (Basile et al., 2016).

Socio-Economical Sustainability: Fostering socio-economic sustainability and providing strengthening economic support to women is also an effective approach to the prevention of sexual violence and women's trafficking. This should include digital safety training and community-based surveillance to identify early signs of grooming (Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, 2023). Furthermore, the development of insight into society, character formation, the development of competencies, helping women become self-reliant, and welcoming physically and mentally persecuted women back into the limelight of society can prevent this type of recurring social problem.

Conclusion

Thus, the study concludes that ethical awareness and a balanced, supportive environment are key to a developed and just country. We should remember that to sustain ourselves, diversity and the safety of all members are a priority. For this purpose, women should not be considered negligible or harassed from any point of view. Every woman has potential, and every woman deserves the right to live in society with respect, priority, safety, and security. However, the article has identified various unacceptable antisocial acts towards women that negatively affect their existence. Gradually, mentally and physically tortured women may die by suicide, which is a tragic indicator of our unsustainable backwardness. Our daily life continues to witness violence against women, and cases of sexual assault and trafficking are increasing. In the meantime, it is our collective responsibility to prevent such violence and be aware of its causes and consequences. The importance of quality education in ensuring the development of morality, values, principles, and an ethical perspective, as well as improving literacy rates and encouraging vocational training, is critical in preventing these social problems. It is also critical to take serious action against sexual acts towards women and to spread awareness among people about the criminal activity perpetrated by men against women.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Arpita Bera*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing;

Funding: No

Declaration: The author has given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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