

# An Insight on History and Causes of Girls Trafficking in Nepal

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## Abstract

Every year a large number of Nepalese girls born in poverty and hardship, these sectors of the population are vulnerable of being trafficked to India and other parts of the World. The history of girls trafficking in Nepal predates modern borders and international laws. The tradition of sending young girls to work in other places has existed for centuries. Historical records indicate that traffickers have taken advantage of the open border between Nepal and India, facilitating the movement of thousands of girls into the sex trade. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted with key informants from Maiti Nepal, Shakti Shamuha, and Nava Jyoti. Data are gathered from structured and unstructured questionnaires, utilizing

Purposive sampling to align with the research goals of exploring the history of girl

Trafficking in Nepal, identifying laws made to tackle it and its root causes and assessing the social stigma and discrimination against the trafficked girls in the society. The study found some major aspects of it. The major causes of girls' trafficking were found to be poverty, unemployment with low level of education, and bad culture/tradition. The open border between Nepal and India and the lack of implementation of laws were also found some of the causes. Although efforts were made to tackle the problem of trafficking, most victims from the rescue centers were found to have suffered from social stigma, religious factors, discrimination, psychological stress, and physical and sexual abuse in their society.

**Keywords:** Deception, Exploitation, Trafficking, Open-border, Vulnerable

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## Introduction

Human trafficking is “a heinous violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms. This crime preys on vulnerability and thrives in times of conflict and instability, with more and more people targeted today” (António Guterres, 2023). UN General Secretary has given message on ‘Human trafficking day ‘the act of enlisting, transferring, housing, or receiving someone under duress, fraud, or deception in order to exploit them for financial gain is known as human trafficking’ (UNDOC, Human Trafficking, 2024) ‘Along with the trafficking of drugs and weapons, human trafficking is one of the crimes with the quickest growth rates. It is also a very lucrative industry, with an estimated \$150 billion in annual revenues. The majority of victims are women, with 18% being girls. Compared to men and boys, they are three times more likely to experience physical or severe assault and are mostly trafficked for sexual exploitations’. (UNODC, 2024).

‘The recruitment, transportation, purchase, sale, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through threats or violence, abduction, force, fraud, deception, coercion, or debt bondage are all considered to be part of the trafficking of girls and women. entails the use of threats, assault,

kidnapping, force, fraud, deception, coercion, or debt bondage to recruit, transport, buy, sell, transfer, harbor, or receive girls and women. The goal of doing this is to manipulate or take advantage of the person’ (Makisaka, 2009) &’ (Cluster, 2024).

Nepal has a long history of trade in human flesh. “ADB Road connectivity project preparation phase of social assessment indicated as “girls and women of the age group 11-25 years old and boys of 6-12 old at risk to human trafficking from poor families (Makisaka, 2009) .Trafficking and exploitation of women are found to have been in practice for ages, in the name of religion and culture. The fact that domestic and international pimps have worked together with respected personalities in the country using various ways to inhumanely traffic and exploit women and children for various purposes has also come to the limelight. So, it is necessary to bring improvement in the discriminatory laws as well as changes in the attitudes and behavior of people towards women and children, especially towards the survivors of such violence and crime, to protect them against such crime. Even after the adaptation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human trafficking, the most “barbarous acts (UDHR, 1948 ( Retr.2024)) and trafficking is human rights violations. In “2018, most women detected were trafficked for sexual exploitation, whereas the men detected were

mainly trafficked for forced labor (UNDOC, 2020)”

Girl's trafficking is one of the major problems in Nepal. ‘The demand for cheap labor, domestic workers, removal of organs for sale, sexual exploitation, criminal activities, begging, or the exploitation for armed groups, are some of the important factors leading to human trafficking’ (OHCHR, 2013). Most of this entire trend has relentlessly victimized and disempowered women, and children by

Exploiting their vulnerability and situation of social exclusion. According to NHRC, 1.5 million Nepali people are vulnerable to human trafficking in 2019 (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Women and girls in Nepal remain more vulnerable to human trafficking for several reasons like economic opportunities and sexual abuse of children, casteism, and gender violence (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

‘Nepal claimed in 1994 that 1,600 girls had been trafficked mostly to brothels in neighboring countries like India’ (Powell, 2003).

‘While there is no reliable data on the magnitude of the trafficking problem in Nepal, the most widely quoted sources estimated that “at least 12,000” women and girls are trafficked from Nepal to India every year, primarily for prostitution’ (Nosheen & Kaphle, 2011) & (Bal Kumar KC, Subedi Yogendra & et. al., 2001)

Most of the young girls are deceived or abducted by pimps, or middle persons, or are promised a good job in an urban area. Some are tricked and sold by their trusted and close relatives, even parents and husbands. There are a high number of stepmothers and stepfathers that sell their stepdaughters. There are many reports where a young man pretends to love and marry the young girls, only to sell them to the brothels.

Such professional husbands are very common in this trade. The residents of the high trafficking area strongly believe that local politicians and administration protect this business and benefit from it.

This study was conducted to explore and derive insight into the causes of girl trafficking in the history of Nepal.

‘The problem of trafficking in women and children is an issue of serious concern at national level as well as international level. As such, it is a serious crime in which women are deprived of their human rights. On one hand, the 21st-century world is in the process of improving the quality of people's lives based on Human Rights and Poverty Reduction. On the other hand, trafficking in women and children is gaining momentum with impunity aggravated by many push and pull factors in the countries of the destination’ (Shibeshi, Zeleke, & Oumer, 2013).

The practice causes intolerable degradation and suffering for the girls and young

women involved, who are treated as a commodity. Girls trafficking is an integral part of the social and economic fabric of Nepal, as in other parts of the world.

According to forced labor in the private economy is estimated to earn “approximately \$150 billion in illicit earnings annually” (ILO, 2014).

The globalization of sexual slavery has created a multibillion-dollar business, riding on the tender bodies of young women. But prostitution is more than a matter of money; it is more than simply work, providing slave work for poor girls and women. Due to a pervasive lack of female empowerment and an acute absence of overall awareness, Nepal is facing an enormous dilemma regarding the phenomenon of ‘girl's traffic’ (Dahal, Joshi, & Swahnberg, 2022).

### Objectives of the study

- To analyze the socio-economic factors contributing to the trafficking of girls in Nepal.
- To evaluate the impact of the open border between Nepal and India on the trafficking of girls.
- To identify the key individuals and groups involved in the trafficking of girls in Nepal
- To identify laws against trafficking in Nepal.

## Research methodology

### Research Design

This research employs a cross-sectional survey design to analyze the history and factors behind girl trafficking in Nepal. Information was obtained from both structured and unstructured questionnaires through purposive sampling. Besides primary data, articles, reports, and books, legal documents were used to get more context and content for the analysis.

### Source of data

Both primary and secondary data in this study were collected from key informants by the use of semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires and informal discussions and the key informants identified from rescue centers, people who were aware and worked in this sector. Secondary data was gathered from different sources, books, articles, journals, and research reports. Information and collected data were crosschecked with the information obtained from some of the key informants.

### Limitation of the study

No study could be free from shortcomings and drawbacks because of various constraints. The human social system is so complex; behaviors are so divergent that it is very difficult to generalize them. This study was limited to trafficked girls at three selected rescue centers within the study area on.

- The respondents (who were trafficked from different communities) were taken with the help of different NGOs, namely Maiti Nepal, Shakti Shamuha, and Nava Jyoti of Kathmandu District that are directly involved in rehabilitation work for any kind of girls' abuse.
- This study was done in selected rescue centers of the Kathmandu Valley.
- It cannot be generalized to the entire country, which is composed of more complex and diverse ethnic groups, cultures, and socio-economic conditions.
- Focal persons at some rescue centers and some victims were unwilling to share their experiences, which may result in insufficient information for the study.

## Analyses and Interpretation

### History of Laws Related to Human Trafficking.

‘A notification alerting the public to the potential of Nepali women being trafficked to India was published in the Gorkhapatra daily in 1947–1948’. (Y. Banjade, Kumari S. Uraon & M. Dharel, 2019)

‘The end of the *Panchayat* system in 1990 marked a huge change in Nepal's political structure. Before that, human trafficking was primarily done for slavery and labor work. Girls were made to serve as maids and sex workers for the Ranas’ (Asha Nepal, 2019).

Before the end of the *Panchayat* system, legislation against human trafficking called Human Trafficking (Control) Act, of 1986 was introduced. The offense of human trafficking was described in Section 4 of the Act, but it connected it to commercial sex work and the sale of human beings. The definition was narrow (Malla, Shrestha, Thapa, & Pokharel, 2014).

Then, Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007 was enacted in Nepal that replaced the aforementioned Human Trafficking (Control) Act, of 1986. This act ensures severe punishments against its offenders. It was adopted in 2008 (Shrestha & Pradhan, 2021).

### Responsible people and groups in trafficking

Trafficking of women and girls involves various actors who aid or abet the movement of women and girls from their place of origin to their destinations. Criminal organizations, trafficking, and brothel managers may be directly or indirectly linked to a complex network. In many cases, parents, relatives, or friends of the trafficking victims are also actively involved in the initial period of procurement (Pragya, 2019). Knowingly and unknowingly people would send girls/daughters/wives and women to the agent who had direct contact with a brothel.

In the rescue center, from the interview, it was found that, in some cases, parents

themselves have taken their daughters to Bombay, and Kathmandu to sell them in brothels.

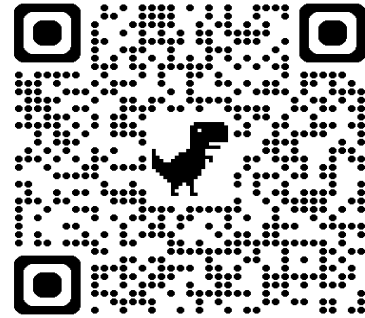
### Primary Routes and Hotspots for Trafficking

Within the country, Kathmandu and different district headquarters are used as destinations of trafficking. Outside the country, India is both the country of transit and destination. Several geophysical, socio-economic, and political factors are responsible for the growth of trafficking in the country. The open border of Nepal with India, along with weak border regulations have been one of the major factors in the increase of human trafficking. According to, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare Nuwakot, in 1998, the 26 districts that were found to be prone to trafficking were Dhading, Sindhupalchowk, Kailali, Kavrepalanchowk, Makawanpur, Gorkha, Banke, Sindhuli, Udayapur, Rasuwa, Nawalparasi, Jhapa, Ramechhap, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusa, Chitawan, Lalitpur, Kaski, Morang, Sunsari, Rupandehi, Parsa, Kathmandu, and Dang (American Bar Association, 2011).

### Trend of Trafficking

The trafficking of women is speculated to date back to the Rana Regime in Nepal when the Rana recruited young girls to the palace to serve as concubines and maids (Asha Nepal, 2019). 'Over time, it has been found that human trafficking has evolved into a systematic illegal

activity that affects particularly women and those of marginalized communities. 'According to the report by the Global Slavery Index, the prevalence of modern slavery is 3.3 per 1,000 people in Nepal. If compared to developed country of Asia, Nepal ranked 21 and 27 is Japan where modern slavery is found 1.1.' (GSI, 2023).



Source: <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/05/17114737/Global-Slavery-Index>

### Causes of Trafficking

Due to the lack of awareness, many Nepalese girls and women are trafficked to Indian cities for sexual exploitation. Many studies support this fact. Lack of awareness in women makes them vulnerable to lucrative lies told by traffickers. So, they are lured into prostitution through various attractive promises like money, employment, and prosperity.

**Key Informant Analysis:** The key informants are taken as one of the source of primary data. The interview was taken with the 10 people who were known on social sector and well known in human trafficking sector.



Cultural attitudes towards children and girls,  
and local laws and regulation

N C.	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
1	Male	20-25	Bachelor	Social Service (Working with the Victim)
2	Female	26-30	Master	Social Service
3	Male	31-35	Master	Freelance Researcher
4	Male	55-above	Ph.D.	Freelance Researcher
5	Male	26-30	Bachelor	Retired Police
6	Male	55-above	Bachelor	Retired Academician
7	Female	55-above	Master	Retired Academician
8	Male	55-above	Ph.D.	Retired Academician
9	Female	26-30	Bachelor	Social Service (Working with the victims)
10	Female	26-30	Master	Freelance Researcher

Source: Primary data

The respondents were selected according to the convenience and with their background of work and known to the subject matter. KII questions guideline was pre-prepared to keep the interview in right track, their answers were recorded and group together to analyze and analyzed.

**Findings of the KII:** According to the interview with the key informants, it was found that many factors increase the vulnerability of children and hence the supply of potential victims of trafficking, both voluntary and coerced. Among the most prevalent causes are poverty and the desire to earn a living or help support the family; lack of education and access to schools, lack of appropriate means to earn a living conflict, natural disasters that devastate local economies,

The desperation that often underlies a parent's willingness to surrender a child to traffickers is frequently compounded by a lack of the full implications of such an action. On the contrary, some families are well aware that the child will be offered for commercial sexual transactions or will endure intolerable labor conditions.

According to the key informants, the main causes of girls and women lured of being trafficked in Nepal were found as below.

- Poverty
- Un employment
- Lack of economic independence
- Lack of awareness of the issues of trafficking and its consequences
- Domestic violence
- Gender discrimination/ Discrimination at home preferring boys
- Conflict
- Illiteracy

- Hard work
- Lack of basic needs
- Lack of education
- Poverty/means of survival

**Cause of trafficking:** A question was asked why the trafficker involved in the heinous work. According to them this has been lucrative works for them and to sell the girls and women in brothels of India, some they are also sold for organ transplantations, some of them for forced labor. 100 percent answered this question and all of them found the same view,

### Categories of Trafficking

According to the report published on 2001 by ILO, “trafficking is classified as Hard trafficking and soft trafficking” (Bal Kumar KC, Subedi Yogendra & et. al., 2001). It violates the fundamental human rights of the child, and the norms stipulated in the new ILO convention (182) of 1999- article 3 indicated ‘ all forms of child labor defined in sub clause a to d , includes trafficking, sexual abuse, use of pornography, use in child military, use of children in trafficking drugs, harm the health , safety, and moral are punishable and need to include in the national laws /Act’ (ILO, 1999)

The people involved in hard trafficking are ‘community members not aligned with family members. They are not known by the family, and it is done by means of marriage and false emotional persuasion, lucrative employment

opportunities, etc’. (Y. Banjade, Kumari S. Uraon & M. Dharel, 2019).

**Soft trafficking:** In cases this case, ‘parents may either silently consent or be actively involved in the processes. (Y. Banjade, Kumari S. Uraon & M. Dharel, 2019). This model may at first glance not fit well into the picture of trafficking that emerges in the ILO Convention (182) and in other international definitions where strong emphasis is paid to elements of force and outright coercion.

### Suggestions to stop trafficking

Weak political commitment, ambiguity and inadequacies of legal provision, weak law enforcement, limited intervention programs, and lack of effective intervention programs and coordination are the major reasons contributing to the trafficking of women and girls in Nepal. Similarly, the absence of an identification and security system for migrant workers significantly contributes to the increased vulnerability of migrant women and girls to trafficking. Although the country has legal provisions for strong penalties against the sellers and buyers of girls for prostitution, the crime is still flourishing because the criminals are not easily identifiable. People in power are themselves involved in trafficking but remain hidden behind the curtain and do not show their faces. Traffickers know that if they are sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment, they will be released within three or four years. These



traffickers then return to their previous practices. According to key informants, one of the sole causes of trafficking is a lack of political commitment. In the past, they have experienced arresting some of the traffickers but due to intervention from political power, the culprits had to be released. So, trafficking cannot be stopped, unless there is a strong commitment from the government, law enforcement agencies, and political powers. Some suggestions given by key informants for the betterment of girls and women trafficking were:

- First and foremost, there should be strong laws against trafficking and at the same time, the laws should be implemented properly.
- Girls and women should be made aware of the issues of trafficking.
- Addressing the preference for boys within families, prohibiting polygamy, and educating the girls.
- Treat daughter-in-law as own daughter.
- Need for the establishment of equal opportunities between boys and girls. For example, job opportunities.
- The government should take responsibility for the re-establishment of the victimized population in every district.

On the other hand, 'Nepal shares 1808 km border with India (Rabi Shrestha, Mukesh Thapa, & et.al, 2020), it is one of the major factors in easing the trafficking of Nepali

women to India. This open border between Nepal and India has been proved as a license to sex slavery. It also makes it easier for traffickers to move across the country. In addition to that, there are many other shortcut roads, which are safer for pimps to transport girls and women for sex slavery. In the view of all key informants, trafficking crime has increased because of this open border.

'The growth of the consumer society is linked to globalization. Globalization refers to the swift expansion of the capitalist market, encompassing both private investment and trade, on a worldwide scale' (McCoid, n.d.). It is basically concentrated to accumulate wealth from the people including middle classes, during the process women and children are being exploited as if they are easily available commodities in the market.

Trafficking should also be analyzed in terms of structural inequality between Third World and Industrialized countries. The consumerism changed the population of South Asian countries into mere labor and commodities and indirectly promotes human trafficking also.

There are many organizations that are working for anti-girls women trafficking. They are adopting different approaches and strategies to stop such activities. Those organizations have

been mainly targeting the victimized age group from ten to twenty-five years. According to key informants, the organizational strategies/approaches were found below:

- Program through authority approach.
- Training/ workshop to minimize the problem
- Counseling, animation and skill training, awareness programs, empowerment, networking, skill for self-reliance; medical, and follow-up.
- Minimize/ stop such practices and empowerment, prevention, and other awareness works.
- Awareness campaign and consultations regarding trafficking in different districts, partnerships, and alliances with other organizations.
- Broader surveillance team need to be active.

## Conclusion

The socio-economic status of Nepalese girls is very low. They do not have much employment or other opportunities. Poverty and gender discrimination make it easier for traffickers to trap girls and lure them away into the closed walls of brothels of big Indian cities. The education status of Nepalese females is very low. Due to a lack of education, they are unable to differentiate between right and wrong. This makes some girls become the victims of such crimes. Other major causes for trafficking are bad tradition and culture, caste hierarchy, and

lack of awareness among girls, families, and society. Due to porous border traffickers search easy way out from Nepal though the legal provisions are adequate. Even though laws are made against trafficking, there is a lack of willpower to implement the laws into action.

Formulation of strict laws against trafficking, effective implementation, awareness among people of low educational and economic status, and active participation of government and other agencies against these types of heinous crimes are a must for controlling trafficking in Nepal.



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