

Breaking the Chains: The Crucial Role of Healthcare and Legal Professionals in Combating Sexual Trafficking

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Abstract

Sexual exploitation is a significant and alarming issue in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, where individuals subjected to human/sex trafficking experience various physical, mental, and social disadvantages. As a pressing health problem, it necessitates the attention of medical professionals and legal experts. In clinical settings, healthcare providers can play a critical role in enhancing the assessment, identification, and government assistance of those affected by human/sex trafficking, especially females being trafficked for sexual exploitation. By providing political and regulatory services, women and girls may get the support they need to recover and reintegrate into society.

Keywords: Sex trafficking, Human rights, Women's rights

1. Introduction:

Human trafficking is an abhorrent crime that involves the illegal trade of humans for the purpose of exploitation. It is a modern-day form of slavery and is defined by the UNODC as any act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through the use of force, coercion or deception. Every year, around 800,000 people are smuggled across international borders, a staggering 80% of whom are women or girls, and 50% are minors.

One of the countries where women are most vulnerable to human trafficking is Pakistan. According to the "World Slavery Index," Pakistan has the third-highest number of enslaved people globally.¹ As per the US State Department, there are serious concerns about Pakistan's inadequate efforts to combat trafficking.² If Pakistan does not take concrete actions to combat the issue, it could be added to the Level 2 watchlist, resulting in the loss of several privileges, including financial aid. Even though the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) requires cooperation with foreign governments to counter trafficking, it is being poorly executed in Pakistan. This failure leaves victims of trafficking without adequate protection, and traffickers without fear of retribution. Clearly, more needs to be done to end this egregious crime and bring abusers to justice.³

According to the Federal Investigation Agency's Red Book, Pakistan is home to some of the world's most significant human trafficking networks. In 2011, there were 95 networks, which increased to 132 in 2012 and 141 in 2013. Gujrat and Gujranwala are the primary hubs for these traffickers, while Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Mandi Bahauddin, Sialkot, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir are also used as staging areas. These networks, numbering over 7,890 people, transported over 8,234 Pakistanis through various routes to the Middle East, Europe, and Africa in 2020.⁴

Furthermore, since 2009, approximately 61,200 individuals have been arrested by the FIA at the Pakistan-Iran and Pakistan-Afghanistan borders. The traffickers employed routes such as Gulistan,

¹ "Human Trafficking in Pakistan: Not for Sale," The Express Tribune, June 2, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/782953/human-trafficking-in-pakistan-not-for-sale>.

² "Pakistan - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, August 5, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/pakistan/>.

³ Ibid

⁴ See supra note 1

Chaman, Rabat, Nushki, Chagai, Mand Ballu, Panjgur, Taftan, and Turbat, and figure 1 highlights these routes.

These numbers paint a dire picture of Pakistan's human trafficking situation, highlighting the need for robust legislation and proactive measures to curb the practice. The government must ensure stronger border control and crack down on traffickers to safeguard the rights and lives of those vulnerable to exploitation.



Figure 1

Figure 1 explains the routes adopted by the traffickers to take out victims who are trafficked from Pakistan.

2. Main motives for Human Trafficking:

Human trafficking is a global issue that has devastating consequences for its victims. The primary motives behind human trafficking are forced labor and sexual exploitation, as depicted in Figures 2 and 3. Victims of sex trafficking are often coerced into engaging in sexual servitude, which extends far beyond the realm of prostitution. Other forms of commercial sex labor that may fall under the umbrella of sex trafficking include pornography, exotic dance, stripping, public sex shows, mail-order brides, military prostitution, and sexual tourism.⁵

It is important to note that while victims of sex trafficking can be of any sex and age, the majority are women and young girls. Despite the fact that many countries have banned it, female trafficking remains a significant issue worldwide, with women and girls often subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Efforts to combat human trafficking must focus on addressing the root causes of these crimes, including poverty, social inequality, and a lack of legal protections for vulnerable groups. Governments and organizations must work together to increase awareness, strengthen laws and policies, and provide support for survivors. Only by taking collective action can we hope to end the scourge of human trafficking and provide a better future for all.

⁵ See *supra* note 5.

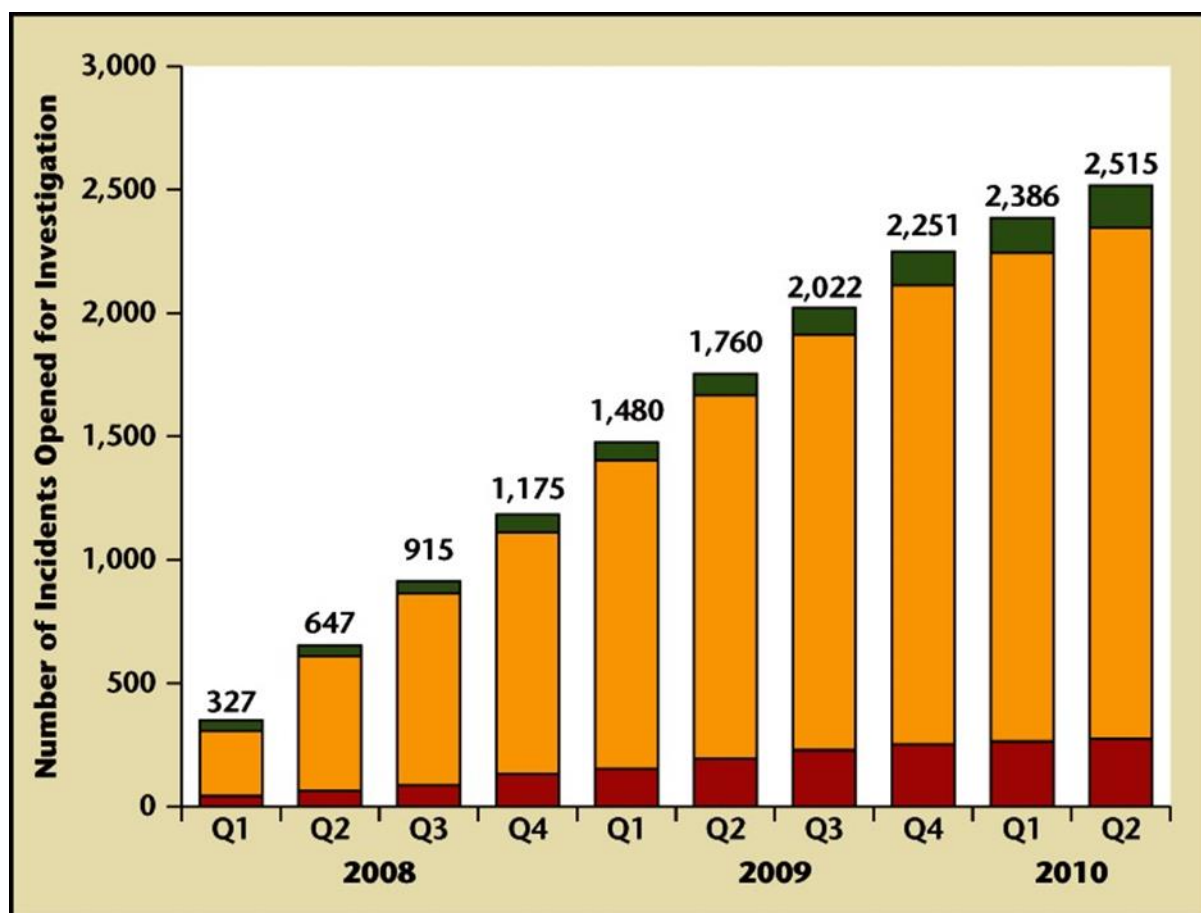


Figure 2

According to Figure 2, there is a cumulative number of human trafficking incidents that occurred between January 2008 and June 2010. The figure also outlines the characteristics of suspected human trafficking incidents that were reported during this time frame.

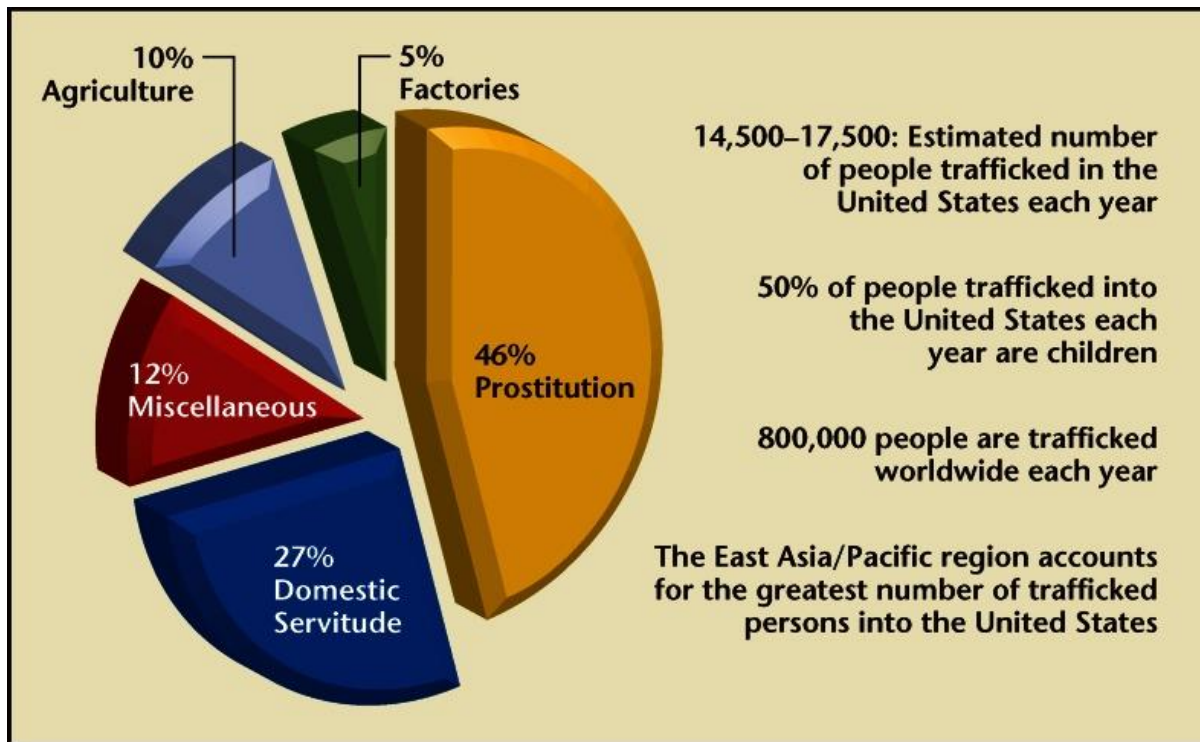


Figure 3

Figure 3 explains the Prevalence of global human trafficking. Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Justice, and Free Slaves.

3. Techniques for Recruiting, Coercion, and Slavery

Human trafficking can take many forms, with sex trafficking being a particularly pervasive issue. According to Figure 4, there are several manipulative strategies that traffickers use to force victims into sex trafficking scenarios. Victims are often promised an appealing career, education, or citizenship in a foreign nation, only to be ensnared in slavery once they arrive. Others fall prey to fraudulent marriage proposals, which ultimately end in enslavement. In some cases, victims are

violently abducted by their traffickers, while others are sold into the sex trade by family members, such as parents, husbands, or even significant others.⁶

Indentured servitude is another common form of coercion used by traffickers. In this unlawful practice, victims are required to provide personal services to pay off a debt, often related to travel or living costs. This can be a particularly insidious form of exploitation as victims may find themselves trapped and unable to escape their situation.

Traffickers often target vulnerable populations, such as poor families or those in need, making them more susceptible to manipulation and coercion. To combat human trafficking and sex trafficking, it is important to address the root causes, strengthen laws and policies, and provide support and resources for victims. This includes education and awareness-raising campaigns, economic empowerment programs, and social safety nets for those at risk. By working together, we can fight human trafficking and help create a future where all people are safe and free.

⁶ Howard J. Willens, Julio A. Chirinos, and Charles H. Hennekens, "Prevalence and Clinical Correlates of Mitral Annulus Calcification in Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites," *Journal of the American Society of Echocardiography* 20, no. 2 (2007): 191–96, doi:10.1016/j.echo.2006.08.010.



Figure 4

According to Figure 4, there is a "power and control" wheel that is involved in sexual violence and exploitation. The wheel is sourced from the Polaris Project.

4. Effects on health Tier 2 Watch List: Pakistan

Sex trafficking is a heinous crime that can have severe physical, emotional, and psychological impacts on its victims. To effectively support and advocate for women and girls impacted by

trafficking, healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, and midwives can play a pivotal role in identifying and assisting victims. In addition to advocating on behalf of the victims to improve their social conditions, healthcare providers can also provide essential treatments to improve victims' physical and psychological health.⁷

Physical

Victims of sex trafficking often suffer from sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea, syphilis, urinary tract infections, and pubic lice, putting them at grave risk of further health complications. Such victims are also at high risk of contracting AIDS. Forced commercial sex work can lead to physical injuries, such as pelvic discomfort, vaginal/anal tearing, rectal damage, and urinary tract problems. Furthermore, victims frequently experience physical assault and torture, resulting in broken bones, bruises, burns, scars, and dental issues, and must be checked for such injuries. Healthcare providers should also be alert for signs of traumatic brain injury, which can cause memory loss, headaches, dizziness, and numbness.⁸

Malnutrition is frequently an indirect physical injury in trafficking, so healthcare providers must also be vigilant in checking for signs of food deprivation. By recognizing the unique health needs of trafficking survivors, healthcare professionals can play a crucial role in providing essential care and improving the long-term health outcomes of victims.⁹

Psychological

⁷ "UNODC - Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling," *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/human-trafficking/>.

⁸ Elizabeth Miller et al., "Migration, Sexual Exploitation, and Women's Health," *Violence Against Women* 13, no. 5 (2007): 486–97, doi:10.1177/1077801207301614.

⁹ See *supra* note 7.

Sex trafficking not only has physical consequences but can also deeply harm a victim's mental, emotional, and psychological well-being. Victims of sex trafficking often experience emotional and psychological abuse and torture, causing moderate to severe psychological trauma. Sex workers frequently suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, acute anxiety, and depression.¹⁰ Therefore, healthcare providers must check potential victims for various psychological conditions such as phobias, feelings of helplessness, embarrassment, humiliation, distrust, self-hatred, disbelief, denial, and suicidal thoughts.

Sadly, it is not uncommon to encounter sex trafficking victims in their early thirties who have been psychologically and emotionally harmed by their years of sex work. Studies have found that sex-trafficked women experience more acute trauma and require more mental health care than other crime victims. Such victims may experience drug addiction and other types of addiction, further compounding their difficulties.¹¹

To provide effective care for victims of sex trafficking, healthcare providers must consider the unique psychological needs of these individuals. Adequate mental health support, preventive measures, and therapy can help improve the well-being of victims and facilitate their long-term recovery. By understanding the psychological scars inflicted by trafficking, healthcare providers can provide vital care and support to survivors to aid in their healing journey.

Social

While there is limited data on the social impacts of sex trafficking, anecdotal evidence suggests that victims of this crime are more likely to experience illiteracy, homelessness, poverty, and social

¹⁰ See *supra* note 8

¹¹ Natalie M. McClain and Stacy E. Garrity, "Sex Trafficking and the Exploitation of Adolescents," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing* 40, no. 2 (2011): 243–52, doi:10.1111/j.1552-6909.2011.01221.x.

isolation. Unfortunately, women who engage in sex work have fewer alternatives and resources compared to non-trafficked women, making them more vulnerable to violence and abuse.¹²

There is a clear need for increased social support and services for victims of sex trafficking. This includes improved access to education and job training programs to provide victims with alternative means of income and a pathway out of exploitation. Access to safe housing and basic needs such as food, water, and medical care is also critical. Furthermore, social support systems such as counseling and support groups can benefit victims by providing emotional and psychological support and helping them connect with others who have experienced similar trauma.

An inclusive and compassionate approach to support efforts to end human trafficking is essential. By challenging the societal factors that contribute to sex trafficking, including poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence, we can help create a safer and more just world for everyone.

4.1.Tier 2 Watch List: Pakistan Legal Perspective

Despite significant efforts by the Pakistani government to combat human trafficking, there are still several areas in which improvement is necessary. While there has been progress, the government's initiatives, such as the new five-year national action plan and the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, fall short of the necessary requirements to eradicate trafficking. Additionally, the COVID-19 outbreak has severely impacted the government's ability to combat trafficking effectively.¹³

¹² "Blue Campaign Training," *Blue Campaign Training | Homeland Security*, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/blue-campaign-training>.

¹³ Tiffany Dovydaitis, "Human Trafficking: The Role of the Health Care Provider," *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* 55, no. 5 (2010): 462–67, doi:10.1016/j.jmwh.2009.12.017.

Although there have been some improvements, sex trafficking investigations and convictions remain low, and law enforcement agencies record almost all anti-trafficking law enforcement activities excessively. Bonded labor victims are also found less frequently, and law enforcement efforts to combat labor trafficking continue to be insufficient given the size of the issue. Local authorities in Sindh continue to use bonded labor in fields and brick kilns with impunity. Furthermore, for the second year in a row, the government has failed to respond adequately to credible allegations of official involvement in trafficking.

Another critical area that requires improvement is the government's lack of sufficient resources for victim care. As a result of these shortcomings, Pakistan remains on the Tier 2 Watch List for the second year in a row. The government must continue to prioritize tackling human trafficking, allocate resources towards supporting trafficking victims, and hold accountable those responsible for perpetrating these crimes. Nonetheless, these issues must also be addressed comprehensively by dealing with societal factors that contribute to human trafficking, such as poverty and gender inequality.

Prevention

Despite the government's claims of increased efforts to combat human trafficking, there are still significant gaps in their approach. Though there was a notable increase in the number of identified trafficking victims, particularly transgender individuals, the government's response to bonded labour remains inadequate. According to police reports, the number of identified bonded labour victims has dramatically decreased, from 760 in 2019 to just 30 in 2020. However, it is unclear

how effectively the government is communicating and utilizing its standard operating procedures for identifying victims.¹⁴

In January 2021, the government approved the implementation rules for the 2018 Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Act (PTPA), which outline measures for identifying trafficking victims and offering assistance. While the regulations provide some protection for victims and basic standards for NGO assistance, they primarily focus on law enforcement investigations and awareness activities. The government must do more to fill the gaps in its approach, particularly in addressing bonded labour and ensuring effective communication and implementation of its protocols for identifying and assisting trafficking victims.

Protection

Pakistani men and women often migrate voluntarily to countries such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Europe in search of low-skilled jobs in agriculture, domestic service, construction, and driving. However, some are trafficked as slaves, particularly in the sex trade and bonded labor sectors. Many are lured by false job offers they receive through illegitimate employment agencies or sub-agents of official overseas employment promoters. These individuals charge substantial recruitment fees, leaving many workers in debt bondage.

In 2020, over 11,000 Pakistanis were imprisoned in foreign countries, with Saudi Arabia accounting for over 3,400. Many of them were detained for possessing false documents or lacking proper documentation, often due to the failure of their employers to provide these.

¹⁴ Janice G Raymond and Donna M Hughes, *Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends* (University of Pennsylvania, 2001).

Trafficking of Pakistani citizens is not limited to their own country, as forced labor and exploitation have been reported in countries such as the UAE, Greece, Kenya, and Iran. Traffickers have even targeted individuals with disabilities for forced begging.

Pakistanis are not the only victims of trafficking within the country, with refugees and minority groups being particularly at risk. The Rohingya refugees in Pakistan are a particular target for forced labor. Lastly, even Chinese construction workers in Pakistan appear to be vulnerable to forced labor. The government of Pakistan must take stronger action to combat trafficking and prevent the exploitation of all vulnerable populations.

5. Conclusion

Sexual trafficking is a critical issue that has severe consequences on the physical, mental, and social health of its victims. As a result, it is crucial for both medical and legal professionals to pay attention to this problem. Victims of sex trafficking often have poor health outcomes, including chronic pain, sexually transmitted infections, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory infections, and injuries. These individuals may also suffer from mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation.

Consequently, healthcare practitioners can play a significant role in the identification, screening, and assistance of sex trafficking victims. They must receive appropriate training to recognize the signs and symptoms of trafficking and understand how to respond.

Moreover, healthcare providers should also provide broader support to victims of sex trafficking, including legal and social resources. They can connect these individuals with resources such as counseling and legal aid to support their healing and rehabilitation.

The societal impacts of sex trafficking are also significant. Beyond the individual victim, trafficking can also contribute to public health risks, increased healthcare costs, and a heightened demand for medical and social resources. By addressing the issue of sex trafficking at a medical and legal level, the society can address the social and health issues that these victims face while lowering the societal costs of trafficking.

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