

Reducing Child Trafficking in India: *The Role of Human Rights Education and Social Work Practice*

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Abstract

Child trafficking is one of the cruelest crimes that could ever be committed. Not only is it a criminal offense throughout the world, but it is also a violation of several human rights and child rights. The present article explores the meaning, objectives, and consequences of this abhorrent act along with its prevalence globally and in India. However, the crux of the article is on the role of human rights education and social work practice in arresting the growth of child trafficking in India. Human rights education in India is the need of the hour, especially since it has the capacity to not just enlighten the public about their human rights and the rights of children, but also because it can motivate professionals to shoulder their responsibility and work to reduce the prevalence of child trafficking in the country. Human rights education can also empower vulnerable communities who have been historically denied of their dignity, to rise and protect their children from such crimes. Among other things, the author has also discussed the three major models of human rights education and how it can be used to address the issue of child trafficking. Finally, the role of social workers in addressing this issue has also been discussed. Human rights education and social work practice have several facets in common that have the capability to greatly reduce the prevalence of child trafficking in the country.

Keywords: child trafficking, human rights, human rights education, social work practice, India

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank Mr. Nirmal Joseph Das, Manager, International Justice Mission, Bangalore and Mr. Ramachandran Sudalaiyandi, Regional Coordinator, Bangalore Urban & Rural Districts,- Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, for their valuable insights into the current child trafficking scenario in India.

Statement of Declaration

The author has no competing interests to declare.

“This version of the article has been accepted for publication, after peer review but is not the Version of Record and does not reflect post-acceptance improvements, or any corrections. The Version of Record is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-023-00246-3>. Use of this Accepted Version is subject to the publisher's Accepted Manuscript terms of use <https://www.springernature.com/gp/open-research/policies/accepted-manuscript-terms>.

Introduction

Human trafficking which is one of the most horrendous forms of human rights violation, is a major concern for almost all the countries of the world. One can also argue that perhaps it is the most marginalized who are also the most affected by this human right violation. Throughout human history, those who are marginalized and have had fewer resources, have endured the *greatest* suffering during times of crisis (Gabel & Mapp, 2021). Specifically, it is children who hail from marginalized sections of society who are arguably the most vulnerable of them all because when families and communities of such sections are uncared for, then the wellbeing of children is affected as well (Gabel & Schmitz, 2022). Child trafficking is an evil that plagues the world in general and India in particular, where an uptick in child trafficking has been reported (Deb, 2015).

Before dwelling into the current scenario, it is necessary to dive into the definition and meaning of human trafficking which includes child trafficking. Human trafficking is defined in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2020), as "the recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion." Human Trafficking is a large scale criminal industry that has been growing at an alarming rate over the last few decades. In 2014, the International Labour Organization estimated that the human trafficking industry generates over \$150 billion in profit (ILO, 2014). This provides one with an idea as to how serious the matter is.

Moreover, one of the key objectives of human trafficking is forced labor and it is estimated that 11 million victims, of the total 21 million victims of forced labor are from the Asia Pacific region (ILO, 2018). This is truly worrying for a country such as India which is located in this region and has always been known for high rates of human trafficking including child trafficking. The United Nations Palermo Protocol defines child trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation" (United Nations, 2000). Furthermore, the protocol also defines a child as anyone below the age of eighteen (United Nations, 2000). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "Governments must make sure that children are not kidnapped or sold, or taken to other countries or places to be exploited" (UNICEF, 1989). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) also offers several other rights, such as the right to education, protection from violence, sexual abuse, harmful work, and exploitation.

The present article is aimed at exploring the meaning, objectives, and consequences of child trafficking along with its prevalence globally and in India. However, the crux of the article is on the role of human rights education and social work practice in arresting the growth of child trafficking in India. Specifically, the article throws light on the nature of child trafficking, its prevalence around the globe and in India, the magnitude of the problem in India along with the existing legal provisions to curtail it, apart from the role of human rights education and social workers in protecting children from this abhorrent human rights violation.

Child Trafficking – A Human Rights Violation

Child trafficking is a violation of several human rights. It is also a violation of the rights and freedoms that are granted to all citizens including children throughout the world or at least in all the democracies of the world. Human trafficking including child trafficking, constitutes three sections, namely the act, the means, and the purpose (Cockbain & Olver, 2019). The means, which could be a form of fraud is not necessarily required for an act to be called - child trafficking since children cannot provide informed consent and they are often trafficked for the purpose of sexual and domestic servitude, adoption, organ harvesting, drug cultivation, and begging, to name a few (Cockbain & Olver, 2019). Although there have been some doubts raised about cases in which individuals have given consent, according to the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol, the consent given by victims is irrelevant when the trafficking is carried out by force, deception, coercion, abuse of power or position of vulnerability. Furthermore, since children cannot give consent, irrespective of the means used to traffic them, it is still isn't justifiable in any manner whatsoever (UNODC, 2020).

Trafficking children is relatively easier than trafficking adults since children are trusting by nature and believe that adults will always do that which is best for them (the children). From this perspective, apart from child trafficking being a breach of several human rights including child rights, it is also an abuse of the trust that a child places on an adult which might lead to long term psychological harm to the child. Since human beings are social animals and social interaction and trust are essential parts of living, it becomes increasingly difficult to live without being able to trust people around oneself. One becomes forced to living in constant fear, insecurity, and trauma after such negative childhood experiences. This is why child trafficking is an unforgivable crime, a crime that hurts the most vulnerable among us. Technically, children can be trafficked through coercion, trickery, use of drugs, or even misinformation by their traffickers (ILO, 2002). Child traffickers tend to target children with unmet needs and employ tactics such as praise, promise of love and adventure, and goods, to make the child feel special, and to smoothen the process of trafficking (Wood, 2020). Forced labour and sexual exploitation are the two most common motives, among others, behind child trafficking and while most victims of child trafficking for forced labour are boys, girls are more likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2020). It is also estimated that majority of the child soldiers in conflicts are in fact abducted into it (Conradi, 2013). Forced marriages can also be the goal behind trafficking a child and children who are trafficked with the objective of forced marriage, generally tend to be young girls (Rafferty, 2013).

Adding to all this is India's rigid social structure wherein people and children from disadvantaged groups such as the Dalit and tribal communities are often the target of such crimes and are arguably the most vulnerable as well (Child Rights and You, 2020). As part of the systemic injustice and social exclusion faced by the Dalit and tribal communities in India, they have been denied access to education and employment opportunities for generations together, leading to increased vulnerability to crimes like child trafficking.

Another important and hidden factor that has been known to solidify or legitimize the caste system that excludes the Dalit and the tribal communities and increases their risk of experiencing several human rights violations, including child trafficking, is the religious concept of karma (Cotterill et al., 2014). Karma can best be understood as a heavenly bank account that determines the fate of every individual (Schlieter, 2013). In other words, the actions of an individual in this life will determine that individual's fate in the next one. This form of religious thought is then used to justify the caste system that socially excludes the Dalits (Cotterill et al., 2014) as well as the tribals, and indirectly supports the notion that they deserve to suffer because of their crimes in their past lives.

Children who are trafficked are likely to suffer multiple traumas and psychological problems (Adesina, 2014). Rafferty (2008) notes that existing literature indicates that children who are trafficked, face or develop several complications such as educational deprivation, physical health problems caused due to a poor diet, physical abuse, and forced unsafe sexual practices leading to unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, poor emotional wellbeing due to the trauma caused by forced separation from family, and negative behavioral outcomes such as mistrust of adults and anti-social behavior.

Marginalized Groups and Vulnerability to Child Trafficking

As noted in the introduction section, it is children from the marginalized sections of society who are highly vulnerable to child trafficking although it can happen to any child in general. Poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and rigid social stratification systems such as the caste system in India, could be powerful factors contributing to the magnitude of child trafficking around the world and particularly in India. It can be added that the role of culture and religion is also of significance. Now that we have an understanding of what constitutes child trafficking, its objectives, and consequences, let us examine the current status of child trafficking around the world.

Global Prevalence of Child Trafficking

The ILO (2010) once estimated that there were 1.2 million children who were victims of child trafficking at any given time. By the year 2017, that number rose to 4.8 million (Romero et al., 2021). It is estimated that there are about 10 million children among the 40 million people who are trafficked each year (Broder, 2021). In its global report on trafficking in persons, the UNODC (2021) notes that one-third of all victims of human trafficking are children, with girls and boys constituting 19 per cent and 15 per cent respectively, of the total percentage of the victims. It has also been established that globally, the main objective behind child trafficking is sexual exploitation although the prime purpose behind it in low income countries is labor exploitation (UNODC, 2021). It is communities in extreme poverty from where child trafficking is likely to emerge (UNODC, 2021). There are also concerns that the pandemic, leading to the closure of schools and to the shift to online education could have increased the possibility of online child sexual exploitation and that the economic damage would have further increased the vulnerability of communities to child trafficking (Giammarinaro, 2020). Hard data on the impact of the pandemic on child trafficking around the globe are yet

to be collected and examined, although there is every possibility of the pandemic contributing to the worsening situation (Giammarinaro, 2020). As far as the percentage of children among all trafficked victims is concerned, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of child trafficking victims (59 per cent). This is followed by the regions of Central America and Caribbean (48 per cent), Western Europe (35 per cent), Eastern Asia and the Pacific region (31 per cent), North Africa (31 per cent), Central and Southern Europe (26 per cent), and South America (6 per cent) (UNODC, 2021). Despite all the estimations, it has to be acknowledged that human trafficking of all forms is a challenging crime to detect as traffickers do not always use force and tend to resort to psychological tactics such as developing a trauma bond with the victim in order to simplify the process of trafficking the individual (Mehlman-Orozco, 2020). There are also concerns of the crime, generally being under-reported (Gibbs, 2020) which in turn means that we are operating on incomplete information and cannot be certain about the severity of damage being caused by this abhorrent human rights violation. However, it is fair to assume that the actual numbers could be well over the reported numbers as there is a high possibility of the child traffickers either being close family members or someone known to the child since the individual needs to gain the trust of the child for the purpose of trafficking and because the alternative methods such as coercion could lead to detection by the community or the police.

India has become one of the main suppliers of children for sexual exploitation (International Justice Mission, 2017 as cited in Kakar, 2020). In fact, there have been reports about girls being injected with growth hormones to make them look like grown up women for easing the process of sexual exploitation (Kakar, 2020).

Child Trafficking in India: Magnitude and Legal Provisions

In 2019, The National Crime Records Bureau of India (Munshi, 2020), reported 6,616 cases of human trafficking in the country. As per government records, there were 751 reported cases of child trafficking in the country in the year 2020 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021). The Indian Railway Protection Force (RPF), in the month of January, 2022, rescued 1,045 children from being trafficked (ANI, 2022). It is also important to note that there are child desks in 132 railway stations across the country to help protect children from exploitation (ANI, 2022).

Specifically, the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal are reporting the highest number of child abduction and kidnaping (NCRB, 2020). Since child trafficking is a hidden crime, there could be a vast difference in the reported cases and the ground reality of it. This is partly due to the difficult nature of identifying victims of child trafficking (Warria et al., 2015) and the justified fear among victims to come forward and report what they had undergone, leading to retribution by their former captors. A more realistic estimate is one that suggests that annually, there are 135,000 children being trafficked in the country (Lal, 2016) and of the people who are rescued, majority (60 per cent) are children (Dunkerley, 2021). As highlighted in the previous sections, some of the most affected groups of people are those who belong to the marginalized sections of society, namely- the Dalits, those who are economically

disempowered such as migrant workers and their children, and children who have dropped out of school and have not experienced equality of opportunity in terms education.

The Dalits in India have been exploited for centuries together as part of the caste system. Apart from being socially excluded from mainstream society, they are also subjected to various forms of violence as suggested by previous research (Prasad & Bibhar, 2020). This undoubtedly puts Dalit children at a greater risk of child trafficking since the socio-cultural, economic, and political structure is apathetic towards their suffering. It is not just the Dalits, but also the children from the Scheduled Tribe category who are highly vulnerable to child trafficking. The Scheduled Tribes in India, like the Dalits, are a group who have been historically excluded and exploited by mainstream society. This social exclusion translates into bullying in school, vulnerability to sexual harassment, and lack of opportunities for gainful employment, etc. Currently, there is a need to prevent both internal and international trafficking of children.

Child trafficking -Legal Provisions and Government Efforts

Now the question is - What are the existing laws to prevent or address child trafficking in the country? They are - 1) The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, aimed at preventing sexual exploitation of both women and children. 2) Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code, which is used to counter child trafficking and its different objectives such as physical and sexual exploitation as well as for slavery and organ removal. 3) The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012, which also adds to the existing legal protection for children from sexual harassment and other forms of sexual exploitation (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022).

Despite these provisions and legislations, human trafficking, and specifically child trafficking continues to be a major problem, with India being classified as a tier 2 country by the United States Department of State (2022). This essentially means that despite the significant efforts of the government, it does not meet the minimum required standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, aimed at preventing human rights trafficking and also protecting the survivors of human trafficking (American Bar Association, 2022). The consequences of allowing human trafficking is the rise in the number of child laborers who are believed to constitute 13 per cent of the working population in the country (Srivastava, 2019). With sexual exploitation being one of the major objectives of child trafficking, it is not surprising to note that there are about one million child sex workers in India (da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019). Despite the legal efforts to crack down on sex trafficking, it still continues to persist. Along with an improvement in the ease of availability of online pornography, the phenomenon of human trafficking and particularly child trafficking for this purpose, is also bound to rise. This ever increasing demand for pornography motivates traffickers to continue trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation, especially in developing countries where the pornography industry is largely underground and unregulated by the government. All of this increases the difficulty for state authorities to identify child trafficking operations. Based on what is known, it appears that the first and foremost difficult step that is necessary to undertake in addressing child trafficking in India, is employing more efficient and accurate means of

detecting the magnitude of the crime and the prevalence of it. Although recording the number of cases being reported is a decent start, it is nowhere close to providing a detailed snapshot of the problem and this in turn highlights the need to step up efforts to identify and reduce victims of child trafficking, before they are lost and forgotten. It also has to be acknowledged that successive governments in the country have attempted to alleviate poverty, which is widely considered to be the root cause of crimes such as human trafficking including child trafficking. One such government effort is called the Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojna, which is aimed at providing employment opportunities for the educated but unemployed poor. Although it has been successful to a certain extent, a lot more can be done in this area.

Importance of Human Rights Education in Reducing Child Trafficking

Child trafficking is a gross human rights abuse at different levels. First of all, it is a violation of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." Trafficked children are forced to give up their childhood, their liberty, and are coerced into working in dangerous and often life-threatening occupations by their exploiters. Child trafficking is also a violation of Article 4 (on slavery), Article 5 (torture and inhuman treatment), and Article 26 (right to basic education). India was one of the first countries to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and as a result, parts of the Indian constitution also resemble the Universal Declaration (Dhar, 2012). In fact, some of the rights enshrined in the UDHR, such as the freedom of movement were shaped by representatives from India such as Hansa Mehta, M.R. Masani, and Lakshmi Menon (Norwegian Human Rights Fund, 2022). It is unfortunate to note that these rights are now being violated by human traffickers around the world and in India as well and it is becoming more and more impossible to detect the offense and bring the offenders to justice. With the growth and development of internet in India, there has also been an increase in the supply of child pornography in the country and is subsequently another cause for concern that certainly increases the possibility of child trafficking. Children being given unsupervised access to smartphones connected to the internet is providing child traffickers the opportunity to exploit the gap and lure vulnerable children. In this context, a great need for human rights education emerges as it is a tool for global realization of human rights (Lohrenscheit, 2002).

Human rights education is education that is aimed at educating individuals about their human rights and on how to protect and promote them. This is specifically important for members of vulnerable communities and their children, as it will grant them a shield to defend themselves from predatory traffickers who prey on the lack of education among vulnerable sections.

There is evidence to suggest that education in general can help reduce child trafficking (Ezeibe et al., 2021), which further strengthens the cause for promoting human rights education, globally but with greater emphasis on those regions of the world where human rights abuses such as trafficking are rampant. Human rights education can be categorized into three distinct models as noted by Tibbitts (2002) - 1) The awareness model, focused on spreading awareness

regarding the history of human rights and the existing mechanism to protect human rights. It is usually meant for the general public and children in schools. 2) The accountability model, aimed at educating professionals on how they could work towards preventing human rights violations and protecting vulnerable communities. 3) The transformational model, which is generally aimed at individuals and communities who have undergone human rights violations themselves such as minority groups and members of post-conflict societies. The objective of this model is to approach human rights education from both psychological and sociological perspectives and includes leadership development, conflict resolution techniques and activism (Tibbitts, 2002). In the context of child trafficking, all three models of human rights education are necessary. Apart from spreading awareness to children in schools, the training of teachers as human rights educators is very important as it has been found that their transformation and interest in human rights can help improve the situation in schools, households, and the community at large in the Indian context (Bajaj, 2011). This is a combination of the first two models, wherein, apart from the teachers educating children on the importance of human rights (spreading awareness), they are also voluntarily adopting the responsibility as a group of professionals and are ready to prevent human rights violations. In general, human rights education in the country is still in its early stages with increasing focus on the awareness model. The history and evolution of human rights education in India dates back to the 1990s when the government wanted to find ways to implement the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (Bajaj, 2012). These efforts eventually led to human rights education being included in the National Curriculum Framework in 2005 and then later being introduced as an elective in all government run schools (Bajaj, 2012). Even today, the focus of human rights education in the country is on educating children. In order to make human rights education become mainstream in India, greater efforts need to be made. Currently, it is the non-governmental organizations such as the Institute of Human Rights Education, that are working towards this objective (Bajaj, 2012). Awareness among children, though very important, is not sufficient enough to end or at least reduce instances of child trafficking in the country. Although awareness might help children to be vigilant about the possibility of their rights being violated, the other two models of human rights education, namely, the accountability model and the transformational model, need greater emphasis at this moment. Since children, especially those who are too young, cannot speak for themselves someone needs to speak up to protect them at certain times. The fact remains that child advocacy is the need of the hour and models such as the child advocacy centre model (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016) could be used along with the accountability model of human rights education in the fight against child trafficking. The child advocacy centre model, which was developed in the United States and later adopted in Europe as well, is a child friendly model in the context of child protection (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016). Under this model, children are spared from further trauma inducing interviews and the entire process is carried out in a child focused setting (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016). Apart from this model, the accountability model of human rights education is also very important. The accountability model assumes that the professionals involved in preventing human rights abuses such as child

trafficking are already aware of their roles and responsibilities as protectors as it is a part of their professional roles (Tibbitts, 2002). Some states like Assam have recently reported an extremely high number of cases of child trafficking (Sentinel Digital, 2021). As such, there is a need to conduct research to understand the main motive behind child trafficking in specific parts of the country and then develop administrative plans to tackle it accordingly. Since poverty has been cited as one of the root causes of child trafficking (Boyden & Howard, 2013), vocational skill training for survivors and their families could be organized at different administrative levels to reduce their level of vulnerability to the tricks of traffickers. It has to be acknowledged that no parent, relative, or friend, should have to watch silently as someone they love or care about is being trafficked. In order to fully grasp the issue of child trafficking, one has to understand the painful circumstances under which it occurs and only then can the root cause be addressed through economic and social empowerment. It is necessary to remember that only when the survivors are empowered themselves, can there be a systemic change for the better.

The Indian government is obligated to protect human rights of the children. Apart from the efforts of the government, there is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which is an international treaty that lays out all the basic rights of children around the world. The Indian government has signed as well as ratified this treaty and therefore, it has an obligation to ensure its implementation. Article 34 of the convention states that State Parties must protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (United Nations, 1989). Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which India has signed as well as ratified, contains the 30 articles that are aimed at preventing human rights violations including slavery that is an outcome of trafficking (United Nations, 1948). In fact, many of the provisions in the Indian Constitution have been inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hence, the government has both national and international obligations to prevent child trafficking. Of course, the government alone cannot manage this huge task and this is why the role of social workers in this regard is paramount.

The International Federation of Social Workers, defines social work as “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.” The term ‘liberation’ is central to social work practice as far as battling child trafficking is concerned.

In India, social workers are largely employed in non-governmental organizations. Apart from carrying out rescue missions, there is a need for non-governmental organizations to shelter and enable children, to exercise their right to education which is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), and the Right to Education Act, in India (Government of India, 2009).

Role of Social Workers in Reducing Child Trafficking

Social workers not only have a professional responsibility towards preventing child trafficking and protecting survivors from the further possibility of exploitation, but they also have the moral responsibility of empowering communities to the extent that the conditions necessary for the existence of child trafficking in the community do not arise in the first place. In that sense, child trafficking is not just a problem, but is also a symptom of systemic issues such as poverty, social exclusion of certain sections of society such as the Dalits (Ovichegan, 2014) and tribals, and the lack of community policing. It is also worthwhile to note that at the end of the day, social work practice aimed at ending child trafficking needs the support of the existing child protection system in India. In this regard, the ministry, that arguably has the highest responsibility towards the protection of children in the country, is the Ministry of Women and Child Development at the central level, which is responsible for formulating policies and schemes for children (Rotabi et al., 2019). One such scheme is the Integrated Child Protection Scheme which mandates both the government and non-governmental organizations to work together and engage in community based interventions for protecting various categories of vulnerable children in the country. Moreover, as per the scheme, the state governments are asked to establish State Child Protection Society and District Child Protection Units (Rotabi et al., 2019). It is also noteworthy to acknowledge that Articles 19 and 34 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in the year 1989 and which India ratified in 1992, place the responsibility of protecting the rights of the child, primarily on the state (UNICEF, 1989). The state, although powerful, does not have the specialized tools nor personnel necessary to engage in community based intervention successfully without the support of civil society and social work professionals in particular.

It is important to note that human trafficking, including child trafficking has four distinct stages, namely - luring, grooming and gaming, coercion and manipulation, and exploitation (Nova Scotia Crime Stoppers, 2018). For social workers, identifying these stages is critical to help reduce the instances of child trafficking.

Social workers need to devise their own counter-strategies. The first two stages of luring and gaming, involve identifying easy targets and making the targeted child feel special, thereby making them open to being exploited. Since many children in India who run away from their home have no positive feedback in their lives, they are more vulnerable to false attention given to them by child traffickers.

In order to address this at the individual and family level, social workers need to work harder to identify their family members and if that isn't possible, then to place them in the custody of reputed non-governmental organizations working to provide a safe space for such children.

At the institutional level, social workers can also tie up with educational institutions to encourage students, particularly students of social work, to volunteer in detection and rescue missions. Vulnerable groups of children such as runaway and homeless children often end up in railway stations (Mitra et al., 2015). This places them at high risk of being trafficked but also provides an opportunity for detection, intervention, and rescue. Hence, social workers in

collaboration with educational institutions could conduct awareness programs in railway stations and also train workers at the railway station on how to identify possible victims of child trafficking and whom to report it. Tie-ups with educational institutions could also be established for conducting field based research on the number and profile of children who are lost in railway stations or are found to be traveling alone, unaccompanied by their parents or other adults. This helps keep track of the number of children who are vulnerable to being trafficked at least in the railway stations and can be used by the government to update its policies and action plan to protect these children. Despite the best efforts of social workers, there could be children who are caught up in the third stage of trafficking, that is, coercion and manipulation.

Here, social workers need to work at the community and societal level and tie up with the members of the community, especially in those areas where there have been instances of child trafficking in the past. They need to activate a community police force that reports to the social workers in non-governmental organizations in case they suspect a child who has come from elsewhere along with an adult or group of adults who are outsiders, appears lost, confused, depressed, or shows any other sign of being coerced such as bruises on visible parts of the body. Although traffickers are careful enough to not allow members of the community to detect the crime being committed, if the community members are trained to identify signs of child trafficking, it is possible to detect it. In the Thiruvallur district of the Indian State of Tamil Nadu for example, a non-governmental organization has formulated a new system called the Panchayat Against Human Trafficking (PAHT) (panchayats are local governing bodies in India at the local level) with the goal of training panchayat leaders to identify and report cases of trafficking of women and children and to also keep an eye on suspected traffickers (Menon, 2022).

As part of the Panchayat Against Human Trafficking approach, social workers conduct awareness programs on child rights and on the evils of child marriages at the gram panchayat level. This is often carried out through street plays and flash mobs that are bound to attract the attention of the people. Social workers also train whistle blowers at the village as well as at the district level with the help of child protection officers and other experts in the field. As observed previously, it is mainly a community led effort to curb child trafficking.

Assuming, that there will still be children who will end up the final stage of trafficking, that is, exploitation, social workers also need to work at the governmental level and establish tie-ups with governmental authorities to develop district, state, and nationwide human and child trafficking maps to identify hotspots and conduct regular raids to rescue children being exploited by traffickers. Social Workers could also conduct awareness campaigns in public spaces such as bus and railway stations on how to identify children being trafficked and whom to contact in case they do come across a suspected case of child trafficking. In India, a toll free number that anyone can call in case they suspect child trafficking, among other crimes against children, is the Childline number, which is 1908 (Childline, 2022).

At the policy level, social workers could undertake regular and systematic evaluation of the child protection system in the country, to identify existing loopholes and engage in lobbying to help produce positive improvements in the system. One of India's leading child rights organization - 'Save the Children' - stresses that advocacy, which includes lobbying among other facets such as research and policy analysis, is critical for ensuring a lasting change in the lives of children (Save the Children, 2022). Several legal and policy level changes over the decades such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012), as highlighted previously, aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation, ensure that there is a child friendly mechanism for reporting, recording of evidence, and speedy trial through special courts (Seth & Srivastava, 2017). Such mechanisms have all emerged as a result of research and advocacy at different levels and as an effort to strengthen child protection laws in the country. All the strides being made towards making the child protection system more child friendly are welcome because it will ultimately encourage survivors to speak up and will give them the hope that they will get justice for the pain and suffering that they have undergone. It will also help provide a more realistic and accurate picture of the magnitude of child trafficking in the country for follow-up action. The rights of children have garnered greater national attention ever since an Indian child rights activist, namely Kailash Satyarthi, shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai in 2014 (Nobel Prize Outreach, 2022). This is an indication that although we are very far from ending child trafficking in the country, we are at least heading in the right direction. This has also inspired several child rights organizations and social workers to work even harder towards the goal of protecting children from all forms of exploitation, especially trafficking. Finally, social workers in India need to link various parts of the child protection system and unite all the stakeholders in order to end or at least reduce child trafficking to a significant extent. When educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, the government, and larger society, are united through the efforts of social workers, great strides can be made to improve the situation.

Furthermore, at the individual level, social workers, and especially those who are associated with child rights organizations can act as whistle blowers when they witness signs of child trafficking in their locality. At the family level, since poverty appears to be closely associated with child trafficking, social workers could help empower the family economically by directing and informing them about the various employment and welfare schemes launched by the government to alleviate poverty. At the community level, social workers could conduct awareness programs on rights of children and how to identify signs of child trafficking occurring in one's community. Nowadays, with the growth and development of mobile technology, apps that alert governmental authorities as well as civil society in case child trafficking is detected by any member of the community could be developed and popularized by social workers. Finally, social workers need to continue to engage in advocacy at various levels of the government to help improve policies and laws that have been framed to protect children from being trafficked. Throughout this process, the social work value of social justice that seeks to protect the vulnerable and the principle of acceptance are key. This is because,

those who are victims of crimes such as child trafficking often hail from poor neighborhoods and it is important for social workers to accept them as they are without discrimination, only then can the menace of child trafficking be truly defeated.

Implications for Prevention and Interventions- Way forward

Child trafficking is a complex problem that requires a combination of systemic solutions in a systematic approach that goes beyond governmental policies and laws to prevent it. Human rights education is a powerful tool that is yet to be fully explored and made full use of in the Indian context and in particular, in the context of child trafficking in the country. Currently, it is still in its academic form and needs to be transformed into reality with the help of social work professionals. Social work practice with children on the other hand has come a long way in India. Today, there are several organizations filled with social workers, working to protect the rights of children. Their efforts are laudable and have undoubtedly led to an improvement in the level of awareness among other members of civil society and the public. The role of research in this regard cannot be understated. Social workers must collaborate with researchers to undertake studies to better understand the phenomenon of child trafficking and the role of human rights education in the protection of children from such crimes. Currently, there is a paucity of studies examining the role of the different models of human rights education in preventing child trafficking and also on the need for strengthening the community so that it does not fall into the vicious cycle of child trafficking.

The current situation in India with regard to child trafficking is gloomy but not entirely hopeless. The government has been doing its part to improve the situation for decades together and has certainly created a few positive changes. Existing literature on the matter clearly points out the role of poverty in creating the perfect conditions for child trafficking to take place (Boyden & Howard, 2013). As such, the government needs to strengthen its efforts to reduce abject poverty among the people. Awareness is key among vulnerable sections of society, and especially among school children. Social workers need to step up and take an active part in the protection of children from crimes such as trafficking. For this, social work professionals must themselves must be fully aware of the philosophy behind and the concept of human rights, apart from provisions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Once they are aware, they need to network with one another and develop strategies to reduce instances of child trafficking, starting from the local level.

Traffickers in India are currently taking advantage of the fact that the level of networking social workers, the government, and civil society, has not reached its full potential. They are also aware of the low level of awareness among the public about human rights and they take full advantage of this. In order for human rights education to have a lasting impact on society and for it to be an effective tool to end child trafficking in India, it has to be inculcated among the survivors as well. Apart from the economic empowerment of the vulnerable sections, there is an urgent need for educational empowerment through human rights education, as it will not only help survivors speak up and seek justice

but can also provide them the necessary information to protect themselves from future human rights violations (Mubangizi & Kajiru, 2020).

One example of the multi-stakeholder collaboration is the efforts of the International Justice Mission (IJM), which has collaborated and continues to collaborate with governments, social workers, and educational institutions around the world to reduce the instance of human trafficking including child trafficking. In fact, as of 2020, IJM has rescued more than 49,000 children and has trained more than 67,000 officials in this regard (Gutheil, 2020). IJM rescues victims, brings criminals to justice, restores survivors, and repairs gaps in the justice systems (Gutheil, 2020). Another example of a multi-stakeholder approach led by a non-governmental organization is the system called 'Panchayat Against Human Trafficking' which has been previously discussed in the paper.

The magnitude of child trafficking as discussed in the previous sections of this article highlight the seriousness of the situation. In the Indian context, there is an urgent need for social workers is to network with various stakeholders such as the government, civil society, and educational institutions, to name a few, in order to help reduce the instance of child trafficking. Although there have been attempts to collaborate towards this end, the networking needs to be more formal and organized. With a massive population, without formal networking and collaboration, social workers will find it even more difficult to protect children from child trafficking in the years to come.

At this juncture, it is necessary to remember that apart from the role of social workers, the role of human rights education is equally important, particularly for those marginalized communities such as the Dalits and the tribals, who have been historically denied of equality of opportunities at the educational and economic front apart from the social front. Therefore, all the efforts to improve the spread of human rights education must be culturally sensitive and must prioritize those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy because only then can the instances of child trafficking and other related human rights violations be reduced in society.

With regard to further studies on the issue of child trafficking, future researchers could consider conducting comparative studies on the prevalence of child trafficking and protection offered to children in communities where members have attended human rights, and particularly child rights related programs versus in communities where members have not done so. Such an empirical study could objectively highlight the importance of human rights education and could motivate the government and social workers to systematize their efforts towards the vision of an India where all the citizens are aware of their human rights, including child rights, and are willing to shoulder the responsibility of protecting it for the sake of humanity's future.

Conclusions

The present paper has highlighted the magnitude of the problem around the globe and in India. India remains a hotspot for child trafficking. As mentioned previously in this paper, although the magnitude of child trafficking in India is worrying, social workers working at the individual, family, community, government, and policy levels can help tackle

the issue of child trafficking through identifying the different stages of child trafficking and developing effective counter-strategies at each stage, in order to slow down or even stop the traffickers. In this context, the role of human rights education is equally important. This is because one of the key advantages of traffickers is the vulnerability of the poor, which makes them an easy target for all forms of human rights violations, including child trafficking. The contribution of educational institutions in reducing child trafficking by empowering young people with the necessary knowledge about their rights can help protect them as well as others. Apart from poverty, the traditional caste system and other forces of social exclusion have also contributed to the creation of the perfect environment for crimes such as child trafficking in the country, especially against the Dalits and the tribals. The existing legal provisions in the country have made a positive stride towards addressing this issue. However, the underlying sociological and economic factors are too big and too powerful to be addressed only using certain laws. This is where human rights education with specific focus on the accountability model and the transformational model, in collaboration with social work practice can improve the situation to a large extent and protect the children of the country from this abhorrent form of human rights violation.

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