

## A Perspective on the Internal and International Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

The geographical location of Bangladesh has contributed significantly towards making it a hub of human trafficking. The social structure remains overtly patriarchal, with women still treated as lower class citizens. In Bangladesh, several causes of female trafficking have been identified. Research has established that illiteracy, poverty and the proximity of child marriage are significant factors. These factors contribute to the construction of a situation within which women are obstructed in their attempts to become empowered in society and increase their vulnerability to trafficking. The distinct intention of this article is to provide a theoretical explanation of the trafficking of women in Bangladesh. The aim is to establish a link to the Routine Activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) by conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on the sex industry. This paper will also conduct an analysis of how the elements of Victimological theory explain why girls and women of Bangladesh are more accessible and vulnerable to trafficking. Finally, suggestions for the government are made to formulate policies for the victims of sex trafficking.

**Key words:** Routine Activity theory, Life Style theory, Sex industry, Women and Girls trafficking

### Introduction

Bangladesh is located in South Asia and shares borders with India and Myanmar. This country is considered as a source country for providing women to the sex industry. The proliferation of sex industries around the world makes women and girls of this country more vulnerable than any other group (Ali, 2005). The 'Trafficking in Persons' report identified sex trafficking as one of the primary reasons of trafficking in Bangladesh (US Department of State, 2016).

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Since the borders of the South Asian, South East Asian and African countries are relatively more impotent than the first world countries, most of the victims are trafficked from these regions. Trafficked women from Bangladesh are taken to several destinations. The most frequent area has been identified as the Middle East and neighboring countries (Ghosh, 2009). Amin and Shiekh (2011) identified more than one million trafficked women in Pakistan and claimed that around three hundred thousand women are working in the Indian sex industry. After Nepal, the highest number of prostitutes sent to India is from Bangladesh (Joffres, Mills, Joffres, Khanna, Walia & Grund, 2008). The numbers of victims are high in these regions due to a lack of knowledge and unawareness of further consequences. Based on the data collected from 106 countries, UNODC (2021) claimed that 92% of total reported victims of sexual exploitation were women and girls.

There are two types of trafficking of women and girls evident in Bangladesh: internal and cross-border trafficking. Cross-border trafficking is more frequent than internal trafficking in Bangladesh (Biswas, 2015). Women and girls from rural areas, who are the main victims of internal trafficking, are sold to brothels by traffickers. In the rural areas they live at, these victims have to face socio-economic discrimination on many levels. When traffickers allure them with false promises of a better life in the urban setting, they find the offer very attractive and agree to go with them (Sarowar, 2014). Similar methods are used by traffickers in the process of cross-border trafficking. Building trust with the victims and their families through the use of deceptive tactics is the first step of initiating both internal and cross-border trafficking. There are two purposes of human trafficking: one for sexual exploitation and the other forced labor (Neha, 2013). This paper mainly concentrates on the former.

Hasnath and Paul (2000) consider sex trades as one of the most extreme forms of female oppression and have identified certain dimensions behind the repression. One extremely worrying factor is an emerging demand for young girls among tourists for sexual activities (Joffres et al., 2008). Every year, almost 640,000 women and girls are trafficked for sex trades globally (Deshpande & Nour, 2013). However, considerable research in this area enables a comprehensive literary analysis (Clark, 2003; Doeza, 2002; Huda, 2006; Joffres et al., 2008; Kenyon & Schanz, 2014; Tzvetkova, 2002). This paper mainly focuses on research conducted on trafficking of women and girls from Bangladesh and how elements of the Routine activity perspective can explain the process (Ali, 2005; Amin & Shiekh, 2011; Ghosh, 2009; Hasnath & Paul, 2000; Jana, Bandyopadhyay, Dutta & Saha, 2002; Luty & Lanier, 2012; Sarkar, Bal, Mukherjee, Chakraborty, Saha, Ghosh & Parsons, 2008; Sarker & Panday, 2006; Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheswari, Patel, Willis

& Raj, 2007; Tiefenbrun, 2002). The author will also utilize some reports on trafficking of women and girls in Bangladesh to trace factors and the impact of sex trafficking (Gazi, Chowdhury, Alam, Chowdhury, Ahmed & Begum, 2001; Shah, Brar & Rana, 2002). Women and girls are sexually exploited using diversified profit making methods, including pornography, sex tourism and prostitution (Deshpande & Nour, 2013).

This research follows three major steps. Firstly, it will explain the Routine Activity theory and the problem of human trafficking in general (Kenyon & Schanz, 2014; Lutya & Lanier, 2012). Secondly, the researcher will discuss the factors of women and girls trafficking in Bangladesh and will analyze how the elements of routine activity theory relate. Thirdly, the paper will illustrate the impact of women and girls trafficking in sex trades of Bangladesh. It will end with recommendations for policy and future research.

### **Human trafficking from a theoretical point of view**

There are many stories of human trafficking and it is commonly understood that victims represent diversified groups. Trafficking is one kind of violation of human rights, and there are some laws to protect against and prevent it (Joffres et al., 2008). The United Nations protocol discusses the concept of trafficking with regard to stopping, suppressing and prosecuting perpetrators under its jurisdiction. Thus, the concept is based on three important questions:

- a. Which acts should be considered as trafficking?
- b. In what way did the trafficking occur?
- c. What was the purpose of the incident?

These questions are important because traffickers always seek out the most vulnerable groups to capture them in a more convenient way (UN General Assembly, 2000).

The concept of primitive accumulation of capital by Karl Marx enables a better understanding of the emergence of sub-humanity, in which sex trafficking is a particularly egregious manifestation (Marx, 1894). According to Santos, Gomes & Duarte (2010), while capitalism is established on the concept of free labor, it tends to exploit the surrounding environment, nature, space along with the labor. Sex trafficking is the consequence of the development of a worldwide sex industry by which a group of people have been exploited frequently, namely women and girls. Whether it's voluntary or involuntary, this system is causing serious threats sometimes in the name of migration from poorer countries for recreation or sex tourism, and it's also fueled by foreign investment (Farr, 2005).

Women worldwide face more cultural, social, economic, political, and legal barriers in comparison to men. Such is the case at the communal, local, national, regional, international, and familial levels. That intimate partner violence and gender-based violence contribute to women's institutionalized oppression also stands as discourse (Gerassl, 2016). In the context of sex trafficking, the approach of feminists enables the introduction of 'gender' as a critical group of analysis, which is not plausible with other social theories (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2004). Feminist abolitionist discourse asserts that sex trafficking violates women's rights, implying sexual exploitation as a manifestation of men's power over women, violating their physical integrity and subordinating them. In contrast, a few feminist scholars consider sex work as a freedom of choice for the women and girls (Pascoal, 2017).

Cohen and Felson's (1979) work proposes the theory of routine activity with a focus on trends of crime. This approach claims that there are some particular characteristics based on which an offender chooses a victim. Our interaction with people relates closely with victimization. This perspective is a spatial approach that contends that crime occurs at a certain time and space. The daily routine of a person can make them an easier target to an offender (For example, going to clubs every day at a particular time). Cohen and Felson (1979) conclude that there are three elements behind committing a criminal act: motivated offenders, an absence of capable guardianship and a suitable target.

According to the routine activity theory, a motivated offender is a mandatory element for there to be crime in society. A person may commit a crime for several reasons, and the incident is highly dependent on the offender's risk evaluation. In the case of trafficking, traffickers and pimps are considered as the motivated offenders with the only motivating factor being financial gain. Many women and girls have been seen as overambitious as they try to avail citizenship of a foreign country for better living conditions and as a consequence fall into the trap of the traffickers (Deshpande & Nour, 2013). However, an additional dimension can also be found in the research conducted by Cohen & Felson (1979), i.e. the oppression of the women. Moreover, research has shown that pimps always keep good contact with hotels and motels for sex trade. The latter can also become traffickers by trafficking girls using their connections. This known route sometimes encourages them to act like motivated offenders.

The presence of a capable guardian can prevent the illegal business of human trafficking. In this regard, Kenyon & Schanz (2014) mention how Cohen & Felson (1979) state that the concept of guardianship applies to the self-protection of an individual, guardians can look over victim and offender,

enhancements in technology can be used to protect a person or defeat a target. A capable guardian may be a group of individuals or organizations who are responsible for protecting people and visible in the eye of the offender (e.g. human rights organizations, border guards, etc.). Human trafficking mainly occurs through borders. That is why law enforcement agencies and border guards are considered 'guardians', present to protect victims. Besides, family members, friends, and neighbors can also be capable defenders as trafficking usually takes place in situations where there is knowledge or involvement of people with familial ties or close relationships (Sarkar et al., 2008). Technical and modern tools such as surveillance and closed-circuit television cameras can also work as capable guardians.

Perpetrators always focus on a convenient target for their benefit, and this is the third element of routine activity theory. This target may be any object, individual or group of people identified as suitable by the motivated offender. In the case of human trafficking, women and girls are considered more valuable and also accessible (Joffres et al., 2008). Women and girls in a destitute situation (e.g. marginalized group, poor, single parent, immigrant, drug addict, member of a broken family, etc.) are the primary targets of traffickers (APA, 2017; Deshpande & Nour, 2013).

The reasons offered for trafficking were claiming ransom and a way of earning money with fewer efforts. The work of Kenyon and Schanz (2014) claim some additional reasons like drugs and lack of awareness. Their paper differs from the current paper in the context of methodology and aims. That study is qualitative in nature and specifically uses an interview method. Researchers interviewed members of law enforcement agencies and focused on the domestic dimension that sex trafficking has. In contrast, this paper intends to extend the previous work and will discuss the trafficking of women and girls from Bangladesh to other countries.

Other works have also tried to connect the trafficking of women and girls with theoretical understandings. Luty & Lanier (2012) have covered several theoretical explanations of trafficking for involuntary prostitution. They state, "There are currently many varied approaches applied by academics and researchers to explain and respond successfully to the challenges faced by victims and potential victims of human trafficking for involuntary prostitution" (Luty & Lanier, 2012, p. 567). The work illustrates an integrated framework to prevent and reduce the numbers of women and girls trafficked for involuntary prostitution. The article further offers an explanation as to why women and girls are mostly targeted for trafficking utilizing several theories like the rational choice theory, demand theory, constitutive and economic theories. According to this study, the decision to choose women and girls for involuntary

prostitution is based on rational choice and for economic profit. The paper, though, gives little attention to routine activity and our daily interaction as a reason for the causation of trafficking. After evaluating the theoretical analysis of trafficking, they identify six stages of sexual oppression and trafficking namely making decisions, recruitment, transportation, exploitation, transfer, and pain (Lutya & Lanier, 2012). The discussions of decision making and the hiring process of trafficking are based on rational choice. Also, the lifestyle of a person may lead him/her to becoming a victim. Though the methodology of Lutya & Lanier's (2012) paper is quite similar to the current article, it differs on perceptions. While the former tries to amalgamate different crime theories, this paper attempts to show the relationship between routine activity theory and the trafficking of women and girls in Bangladesh.

### **Conceptual Framework for the trafficking of women and girls in Bangladesh: The context of Routine Activity Theory**

Trafficking is the effective recruitment, transportation, disposal or exploitation of a person's rights. Trafficked persons may be denied their rights in multiple forms including sexual exploitation, economic deprivation, and forceful engagement in dangerous work such as drug dealing, fraud, pornography, and nude dancing amongst others. It is like a one track road - once the women and girls are forced to be involved, there is no option to return. Traffickers make illegal bonds with them that they can neither resolve nor ignore. These bonds are a kind of trap that coerces them into sexual exploitation.

Most of the existing research narrates problems by sketching causes, consequences, and outcomes of the trafficking of women and girls. In addition, there is little research that theorizes the trafficking of women and girls in Bangladesh. This paper aims to begin to rectify this and stimulate more focused discussion so that better policy can be developed.

After evaluating the theoretical explanations of human trafficking, the researcher identifies the routine activity theory appropriate for explaining the trafficking of women and girls for sex trades. Hence, the conceptual framework of the paper is as follows;



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework for explaining trafficking of women and girls.

The three elements of the routine activity theory in relation to the trafficking of women and girls are illustrated below;

**a) Motivated offender**

Lutya and Lanier (2012) state, "Women and children are more likely to be victimized by a known person than by strangers." (Lutya & Lanier, 2012, p. 560). The nature of motivated offenders of sex trafficking in Bangladesh is similar to this pattern. Women and girls make up the highest portions of vulnerable groups, and they are not safe anymore in their pre-assumed secure environment (Clark, 2003). Drawing from research conducted in the early 2000s, the relatives and community members of victims were found responsible for trafficking with 17% of them being relatives and 8% neighbors (Ali, 2005). Other research has revealed that 57% of sex workers in Indian brothels were sold or forced by their family or relatives. Similar results were found in another study where around 59.7% of sex workers were trafficked by people they knew (Sarkar et al., 2008).

Traffickers in South Asia manipulate victims with false promises that include better and glamorous jobs, prosperity and hope of marriages. Almost 35% of trafficked women and girls to India are lured by the false promises of better jobs and marriages (Amin & Sheikh, 2011). They also convince the guardians of targeted women and girls in the same way. Agents assure those guardians that employers will maintain contact with them and that those women and girls

will get a month's leave per year to meet with their parents and families. They also promise that those women and girls will get salaries on a yearly basis with free access to accommodation, food and health care facilities. These proposals are very tempting for poor and poverty-stricken parents who can hardly afford the basic necessities for their children (ACD, 2001). As a result, guardians and victims fall prey to those traffickers and hand over their daughters or sisters trusting them.

The sex trade is a low risk and highly profitable business. This high profit-oriented concept encourages traffickers to engage in this business. Traders sell women and girls in brothels of India and the Middle Eastern countries for considerable amounts of money (Huda, 2006). They are forced to work as commercial sex workers in prostitution centers, hotels, and motels (Joffres et al., 2008). Tiefenbrun (2002) finds that traffickers not only sell women to brothels, but that they then have to fulfill debts (if they have any) by working in this industry. Research also highlights how trafficking victims are also tortured brutally for ransom (Ghosh, 2009). We thus conclude that the primary intention of motivated traffickers is economic gain (Gazi et. al., 2001; Ghosh, 2009; Huda, 2006; Kenyon & Schanz, 2014).

#### **b) Suitable targets**

Motivated offenders always try to find an appropriate target. The correct choice of victim helps in achieving their goal. There are some factors that increase the vulnerability of specific groups of people. The components are particularly noticeable in female and female-dominated groups. The crucial issues are social, political and economic that inter-relate to create and perpetuate inequalities in society in order to maintain the status quo (Clark, 2003). Consequently, one group is positioned more vulnerable in comparison to others (Huda, 2006).

Similar to the ways in which social and economic factors make women and girls a suitable target for trafficking, some other factors, such as geographical and cultural factors contribute significantly to an increase in risk. South Asia is considered to be the most vulnerable region for trafficking due to over-population, urbanization, internal migration, poverty and natural disasters (Gazi et. al, 2001). Bangladesh is situated in a geographically tricky position, having a porous border with India in 28 out of its 64 districts and Myanmar in the Eastern part. Traffickers find it convenient to use the land ways/routes, especially the 18 transit points of the India-Bangladesh border for trafficking women and children. The northern and southern parts of Bangladesh are more vulnerable areas for trafficking because of a common border with India (Amin



& Sheikh, 2011). The strong network linking traffickers from Bangladesh with other South Asian countries makes the whole process organized for them. Targeted women and girls are approached and travelled by the local agents and brokers before they are handed over to Indian brokers and international traffickers (Sarkar & Panday, 2006). After crossing the border those women and girls are taken to Kolkata, a popular center for prostitution and then to Mumbai, Delhi or Karachi (Paul & Hasnath, 2000). A small number of women from upper socio-economic classes are also trafficked via air routes to Middle Eastern and European countries (Paul & Hasnath, 2000; Sarkar & Panday, 2006). Cox's Bazar is another zone for trafficking women and girls via the sea and the current Rohingya Influx has further complicated the situation there, making women an easy target for the traffickers and smugglers. Su-Ann Oh and Nicolas Lainez (2018) examined several media reports and documents to understand the sex trafficking narrative in Rohingya refugee camps. They found that both forced trafficking and voluntary sex work are prominent among Rohingya women and children living in the refugee camps. Brokers and traffickers prey on the desperate situations of these victims and lure them for better opportunities. Women are still considered as lower class in the patriarchal social structure of Bangladesh. Also, natural and human made catastrophes play a crucial role to maximize the rate of trafficking of women from Bangladesh (Amin & Sheikh, 2011; Huda, 2006; Sarker & Panday, 2006). Patriarchal social structure and traditional dowry system enhance the possibility of being a target of trafficking for women and children. Patriarchy positions men at the center of the social structure by imposing the dominating roles of earning livelihood and controlling women's lives. On the other hand, women are viewed as submissive counterparts whose roles restrict to childbearing and performing households' chores. Also, a boy child is perceived as a provider of security during their parents' old age. Such fixed gender roles put women in such a situation where they have no control over their life and they do not get any recognition as well for their unpaid labor and contributions. Dowry is another aspect of our patrilineal social system that brings in many other complications for women and girls who are treated as a liability by their parents. Their only goal is to marry off their daughters which are the prime reason for early marriage in such societies. Many poor parents fail to provide dowry or fulfill the post-marriage demands of the groom which leads to domestic violence, divorce or polygamy. Due to the patriarchal mindset, women do not get the chance to resist the consequences or go against the highly prejudiced society. If anyone does so, they are abandoned by their own family and the community. Moreover, sexual purity before marriage is another factor that forces women and girls to choose an alternative path and avoid stigmatization. This is why women and girls find the false promises of a

better life, marriage or employment very tempting (Gazi et al., 2001; Heyzer, 2002). Furthermore, lack of education among women makes them unaware of the various traps of trafficking. This lack of awareness due to inadequate education contributes to making this group more vulnerable than others (Ali, 2005; Silverman et al., 2007).

Existing class conflict in society often makes women and girls a suitable target of trafficking. Conflict creates situations within which paths of trafficking become easier to negotiate profitably and with less likelihood of repercussion. The effect of globalization and radical changes have opened a new window of employment opportunities (both illegal and legal) for women, who previously had to live a confined life at home. Until there are restrictions on the movement of human capital across borders, the trafficking of women and children will remain convenient (Jana et al., 2002). Hasnath & Paul (2000) claimed that the lower economic class people and the women who belong to minority groups fall victim most to trafficking for sex trades. Silverman et al. (2007), referring to Tiefenbrun (2002), mentioned that women who are from the necessitous economic backgrounds are seen to be trafficked by deception and tricked.

In Bangladesh, employment opportunities for women remain limited and there is still visible inequality in female participation in the economic sectors (Byron & Rahman, 2015). Lack of employment contributes to the positioning of women in a weak and vulnerable economic situation. As evidence provided highlights, this weakened position provides a reason for the high number of victims which is around 55% (Silverman et al., 2007). Again, practices which include early marriage and dowry push women to live a cornered and dependent life. It renders women more vulnerable and consequently makes them an easy target for traffickers. It occurs because of their insufficient knowledge about the outer world (Clark, 2003).

A new form of women trafficking has emerged that challenges the process of adequate jurisdiction. A female gets married as a part of a deal to cross the borders, coupled with the purpose of job hunting. This new form, the "arranged marriage", presents difficulties to prosecutions. Within this context there are multiple jurisdictional issues. After crossing the border, the agreement is supposed to end and women are meant to be free. Unfortunately, in most of the cases the women find themselves sold and forced to work as a sex worker. This new form of trafficking produces more barriers to proving the illegality of trafficking (Joffres et al., 2008). It is evident that the aspects mentioned above lead women into an open and vulnerable position. This defenseless condition makes them a suitable target of trafficking for sex trades.

### **c) Lack of proper guardianship**

According to the constitution of Bangladesh, the government is responsible to ensure the safety and security of all citizens (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972). Research displays a significant gap between the trafficking statistics of government and non-government agencies working in this arena. Previous research has shown there is a lack of coordination between respective law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh (Ghosh, 2009).

Trafficking incidents of the women and girls of Bangladesh occurred mainly through the bordering districts of Bangladesh. In several research works, the researcher discovered that members of the Border Guard of Bangladesh are corrupted, and they work for traffickers for material gains (Amin & Sheikh, 2011; Hasnath & Paul, 2000; Tiefenbrun, 2002). Furthermore, the availability of smartphones expands and strengthens the communication system in the sex business. It creates a tougher condition to monitor the trafficking of women and girls from Bangladesh (Joffres et al., 2008). Silverman et al. (2007) argued that traffickers sometimes arrange 'false marriage' to traffic young girls and sell them in brothels. In this process, traffickers deceive as well as manage the law enforcement agencies. Again, research claims that the law enforcement agencies ignore trafficking cases. They do not take trafficking matters seriously and blame the victims for their situation. It creates re-victimization among the women and indirectly restrains those from taking legal assistance. It clearly violates the victim's right and may lead to a feeling of secondary victimization (Hasnath & Paul, 2000).

From the above discussions, it can be assumed that the ignorance and corruption of the border guards of Bangladesh create a lack of guardianship to save women from trafficking. In most cases, it is also observed that the cases of trafficking of women occurred by their relatives and neighbors. Emotional complications and unconsciousness about crucial facts of trafficking produce unawareness among guardians (Sarkar et al., 2008). It is often a difficult and arduous task for those in need of defenders to identify a person who is trying to deceive them. Again, lack of action by the law enforcement agencies and the normative social reaction of blaming the victim keep the reality of the situation hidden and the problem remains under-reported.

### **Trafficking of women and children from Bangladesh: Alternative explanations**

The traffickers ensure a smooth route by managing or skipping the law enforcement agencies' eyes. Thus, a few theorists consider the trafficking of women and girls as an organized crime since the perpetrators are connected by

establishing a social network; a patron-client relationship (Abadinsky, 2010). There is a clearly defined hierarchy among the members of the trafficking groups both in home and abroad. The international trafficking is also known as a transnational organized crime since it connects more than two nations. In general, human trafficking is one of the most profitable businesses in the globe.

However, there are numbers of explanations for the trafficking of women from Bangladesh which can be used in conjunction with or separate from the routine activity approach. The lifestyle approach can be used as a distinct interpretation of the causation of trafficking. Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) proposed the idea that our lifestyle might lead us to be a victim. For example, a lifestyle with more association with drugs and alcohol, attending late night parties makes a person more vulnerable to trafficking. Although lifestyle theory can be used as a distinct explanation, we can relate it to one of the elements of routine activity theory (i.e. Vulnerability makes oneself a suitable target).

Women of Bangladesh sometimes migrate voluntarily to foreign countries with the aims of fulfilling their high ambitions which are not achievable in Bangladesh. They often follow illegal means of migration in an attempt to raise and secure the economic status of their whole family (Amin & Sheikh, 2011). As a consequence, they do not hesitate to take risks to improve their economic situation. Traffickers take full advantage of this situation and thus they become victims of trafficking because of their choices. Explanations which utilize victim choice as a causal factor echo the theory of victim precipitation introduced by Marvin Wolfgang (1957).

Bangladesh provides one of the largest numbers of sex workers to India and other neighboring countries following Nepal (Sarkar et al, 2008). Chinese traffickers force Bangladeshi women, specifically indigenous women from the Chittagong Hill Tracts for sex trafficking through arranged marriages. Some traffickers falsify identity documents like their real age and send them abroad. Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are the most targeted countries where women and children are deported along with hundreds of undocumented Bangladeshi workers during the reporting period.

Advances in modern communication and processes of globalization have made society more connected. The increased ease of international communication and travel has made the trafficking process even easier than it was before. Not only has the movement of victims become easier, but also the difficulties involved in any financial transactions have also been reduced. Traffickers often demand ransom from the family of the victim and with modern advances; this transaction has become more convenient through mobile banking. These developments make the trafficking of women in Bangladesh a safer, easier and transportable business (Clark, 2003; Huda, 2006; Jana et al., 2002).

### **The impact of sex trafficking in society**

Trafficked women and girls experienced both physical and psychological oppression. A number of victims have been seen to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal tendencies (APA, 2013). Trafficked victims can face many different mental, emotional and health problems (Shah et al., 2002). Most previous researchers have focused on the physical health related outcomes of trafficking of women and girls. Here, diversified infectious diseases are common among most of the rescued victims (APA, 2013). The research work of Joffres et al. (2008) elucidated a strong positive correlation between sex trafficking and the emergence of infectious diseases.

Huda (2006) researched the increasingly threatening outcomes of sex tourism and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in South Asian countries. The destination of most of the women trafficking victims of Bangladesh is the brothels of India. Trafficked women and children entering the sex profession are likely to contract HIV/AIDS in the first six months of their work. Their inexperience, insufficient knowledge and negotiating skills of the usage of protection during sex make the customers believe that new sex workers are safe. Lack of access to health care, unsafe sex, sexual violence, increasing demand on the sex industry, restrictions from the Madams/Malekins on the usage of protection and existing myths such as sexual intercourse with virgin girls can cure HIV/AIDS etc. further put those victims in a greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (Sarkar et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2002). Ghosh (2009) showed an association of sex trafficking and the increasing rate of people living with HIV/AIDS in India. After cross sectional research on sex workers in India, Sarkar et al. (2008) identified that illegally trafficked women faced severe violence and Bangladeshi sex workers are at a considerably heightened risk of HIV/AIDS after Nepal. Sexual violence and repeated sexual acts lead to trauma, especially for the younger sex workers (Sarkar et al., 2008).

In addition to the physical and psychological impacts, victims of sex trade also suffer from social stigma (e.g. Alienation, isolation, ignorance and avoidance etc.). According to Howard S. Becker,

Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label. (Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 1991, p. 179)

The primary obstacle of working with the recovered victims of trafficked girls is the fear of secondary victimization. The social taboo deters them to report their cases to the law enforcement agency. Unfortunately, trafficked women and girls are labelled as sex servant. If they desire to reintegrate to the mainstream society, the labelling makes their life even worse. They neither can assimilate with the society nor can return to their previous activities. The dual conflict stands them in a position of undesirable consequences. Hence, we should think of an alternative approach; establishing a victim support center. The support centers will be equipped with physical, psychological and social support for the victims. Similarly, McClain & Garrity (2011) propose for both physical and psychological services to the victims based on their necessity. In addition, they encourage initiating job training and managing temporary shelters for the recovered victims.

### **Progress and the future role in preventing sex trafficking**

In Bangladesh, the government has prosecuted 312 suspects in 403 cases under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 (PSHTA) in 2019. Among the suspects, 256 were prosecuted for sex trafficking and 56 for forced labor. Between December 2018 and 2019, 585 potential trafficking victims were identified by the government and organizations identified and provided support to at least an additional 1,456 trafficking victims, including 543 Rohingya (USDOS, 2020). According to the reports, in 10 years, 3500 girls were trafficked through Cox's Bazar (Fries, 2019). The presence of the Rohingya population in this area makes it a new hub of trafficking of women and girls for sex trade.

The fear of re-victimization often discourages trafficked women who have been rescued from sharing their feelings, experiences and contributory problems in society. The Constitution of Bangladesh assures freedom of movement and protection of its citizens in the article 32 (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972). It is quite impossible for the state to prevent trafficking without a proper understanding of the problem and cooperation from the members of society. However, non-governmental agencies those are operating in Bangladesh are playing an active role in raising awareness and organizing training programs (Clark, 2003). They act both as supportive organs of the government and a pressure group working to formulate and subsequently enforce newer policies. The NGOs are working on creating a victim-supportive environment (i.e. Social activities, academic programs) addressing the problem adequately. According to the report of the US department of state 2016, the government of Bangladesh is providing shelter, safe home and legal support to the women who were previously the victim of trafficking and somehow survived. NGOs

are often limited in the financial assistance, counseling and legal support they are able to offer to women survivors (Tzvetkova, 2002). Victims are also often unaware of or unwilling to receive these services. Fear of negative societal reactions restricts victim's behavior and thus limits the type and amount of support resources they can receive (US Department of State, 2016). There is thus a necessity of taking combined steps by the government and NGOs to reintroduce the victim into the mainstream society successfully.

Bangladesh still isn't a signatory of the United Convention against Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol. The reader can thus easily comprehend the unfortunate situation of trafficking legislation for the victims of trafficking in Bangladesh. The government should work to properly enforce existing policies and take necessary steps to strengthen the laws developed to prevent the trafficking of women.

Bangladesh is in the tier-2 according to the Trafficking in Person report of the United States Department of State 2016. This rating reflects how we are on the correct track, the path towards the improvement of conditions, but also that there is still a long way to go. Reducing the rate of trafficking is the main declaration in the manifesto of the government of Bangladesh and they have already taken some preventive measures. In addition to enacting some preventative measures, the government has also developed some victim support actions, programs and established several victim support centers and safe homes.

Despite these advances, the US Department of State has suggested that the government also moves to incorporate the 'Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (2012)'. They also propose increased efficient training of staff and law enforcement agencies of the government is required if progress is to be made.

## **Conclusion**

Trafficking of women for sex trades is a global, regional and national problem. Research has highlighted how this problem is of considerable relevance in Southern Asia. This paper tried to show the correlation between the routine activity theory and women trafficking from Bangladesh for sex trades. At first, it discussed human trafficking and routine activity theory in general. Then the paper presented how the elements of routine activity theory made women of Bangladesh an easier target for sex trafficking. Also discussed was the severe impact of sex trafficking on physical health (prevalence of HIV/AIDS). Lastly, the paper proposed some collaborative programs aimed at reducing the number of victims and increasing the support available, which could be enacted by the

Bangladesh government with the support of non-governmental organizations. Though there are multiple factors which contribute to the problem of the trafficking of women, the paper found a strong linear relationship with routine activity theory to explain these. It is an unfortunate and disappointing discovery that motivated offenders for trafficking women and girls are mostly acquaintances of the victims. This paper also elucidated that female victim of trafficking are tapped because of a lack of patrolling and monitoring by the law enforcement agencies. However, the increase in the investigation of cases of sex trafficking from 2014 to 2015 shows the concern of the government of Bangladesh (US Department of State, 2016). In addition to this, academic and raising awareness programs are playing a significant role. These programs will inform people about the nature, techniques, and tricks of trafficking. Thus, parents of women will be more conscious and able to restrict motivated offenders.

On the other hand, lack of education, gender differences and limited participation in the economic sector made women a suitable target. There is no alternative or a practical way for the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Though there is an increasing pattern of women's participation in every sector of society, unfortunately, they are still oppressed because of the old patriarchal mentality. Gender-based education can reduce existing hierarchical conflict. The government should begin to create more opportunities for women to improve their living standards. Implementing these suggestions will assist women to become more confident, help make them secure and enable them to live in a society with dignity.

To conclude, this research claims that with more sincerity of effort and a serious focus on the underlying problems, the government can reduce the trafficking of women from Bangladesh. With continued increases in associations between law enforcement agencies and the community people will create active guardianship in society (i.e. Community policing). Furthermore, it is suggested that the government should open a toll-free helpline number which can be used to provide information, services and support for victims of sex trafficking, and also enable anyone to call and report a crime. Mannan (2021) advocates for incorporating anti-trafficking messages in primary education and a religion based campaign. He proposes to disseminate awareness lectures by the Imam of the mosques on every Friday.

It is observed that most previous research conducted in Bangladesh merely commented on the problems by sketching explicit causes, consequences, and outcomes of the trafficking of women. The few pieces of literature found on legal analysis of trafficking in Bangladesh, lobbied for a harder punishment



of the traffickers. On the contrary, this paper advocated for victim supportive initiatives. Future researchers should also insist the government formulate more victim-oriented policies for victims of sex trafficking in Bangladesh. This researcher intends to further this current line of research by interviewing victims of sex trafficking directly and testing the routine activity theory by using quantitative tools.

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