

Rescuing Girlhood from Sexual Slavery

A New Approach for Prevention of Sexual Slavery in Nepal

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Abstract

Many campaigns to end sex trafficking have been successful at conjuring images of innocent girls abducted from impoverished lands while doing little to actually address the greater issue of culturally accepted sexual exploitation of women and children. This research focuses on policy reform and educational programs to *prevent* sexual exploitation in Nepal. Nepalese girls face economic, socio-cultural, and political barriers to their livelihood in a country that overwhelmingly exploits them sexually. Through a critique of historical policies and programs that have more interest in regulating the sex industry to the fringe of society, this investigation recommends a new approach that goes beyond simply rescue and rehabilitation of “victims” to target the underlying forces that contribute to sexual exploitation.

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Introduction

Sexual slavery has always existed, and modern-day sexual enslavement of girls continues to exist despite international efforts to thwart its progression. Sexual slavery ensnares girls around the world, but it is most prevalent in poor regions as the profit-maximizing form of prostitution (Kara 2009). Nepal is one of the most impoverished countries in the world and has faced over decades of civil conflict and political instability. Minority groups in Nepali society are particularly vulnerable to all forms of sexual slavery including rape, forced prostitution, and sex trafficking. In a report of world trafficking and slavery, David Masci (2004) notes that slavery exists nearly everywhere, but it is more predominant in impoverished countries of South Asia, specifically India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. In fact, Southeast Asia is considered an epicenter for sexual slavery (Mam 2008).

Despite patchwork efforts by Nepal's government to rescue and rehabilitate sexually exploited girls, Nepal faces a crisis of prevention whereby inefficient mechanisms actually hinder preventative measures. By looking at the case of the Badi, a minority caste in Nepal, I analyze the complex factors that perpetuate sexual slavery. This holistic and systematic analysis contributes to ongoing debates about the role of governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the midst of ongoing human rights abuses, including sexual enslavement. To date, Nepal's policy and programmatic initiatives to end sexual slavery have proven ineffective because they focus almost exclusively on rescue and rehabilitation of exploited females and fail to address culturally embedded discrimination through programmatic initiatives and policy reform.

Defining Sexual Slavery

In order to understand the present-day context of sexual slavery, it is important to first examine the terminology related to sexual slavery. Alternative terms for slavery have inundated the media in recent decades. Labels such as “bonded laborers”, “trafficked persons”, and “exploited individuals” connote a politically correct nuance that distracts from the actual despondent status of a slave. Recent campaigns to end human trafficking have been successful at conjuring images of innocent girls abducted from impoverished lands while doing little to actually address the greater issue of culturally accepted sexual exploitation of women and children.

Human trafficking is the movement of people across borders or to different geographic locations for the “purpose of economic or sexual exploitation” (Zhang 2007, 106). Trafficking is distinct from smuggling and includes coercion, fraud, and often abuse of abducted persons as defined by the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (2000). By defining trafficking with the purpose of exploitation, United Nations member states are obligated to act against this violation of human rights (Zhang 2007). However, Siddharth Kara (2009, 4-5), an investment banker and business executive, argues:

“Why is this historical practice termed a slave trade and the same practice today termed trafficking? This linguistic attenuation scrambles global attention and blunts abolitionist policies. More focus is placed on thwarting movement across borders than on shutting down the modern plantations to which those individuals are being moved. Such tactics have proved overwhelmingly futile....”

Thus, the term “trafficking” detracts from the ultimate issue of exploitation and slavery.

Human trafficking *is* the modern day slave trade, but the term effectively diminishes the actual act of enslaving a human being.

Slavery, specifically, can be defined as “the process of coercing labor or other services from a captive individual, through any means including exploitation of bodies or body parts” (Kara 2009, 5). In the past, slavery alluded to the importance of ownership. Slaves were kept and maintained for a period of time because they were considered an investment. Kevin Bales (2004), president of the organization “Free the Slaves”, has explained the “new slavery” as a practice in which slaves require little economic investment and are, therefore, disposable. As the population of the world grows, impoverished people become more “dispensable” in the global economy where they have little economic power or political influence. The poor become prey for exploitive individuals and businesses looking to make profit on cheap labor.

Background of Sexual Slavery in Nepal

Sexual slavery in Nepal encompasses trafficking as well as instances of sexual servitude where no geographical movement of individuals has occurred. According to varying statistics from 2010, anywhere from 12,000 to 20,000 girls are trafficked from Nepal each year while thousands of girls, statistically unaccounted for, remain sexually exploited within Nepal (SK 2010). This study will look at policies pertaining to sexual exploitation in general whether or not trafficking is involved. Therefore, the topic of sexual slavery, for purposes of this study of Nepal since the 1960s, expands the definition of slavery that involves coercion of human beings to include exploitation through sexual means. Ultimately, sexual slavery is bondage to an owner who makes a profit off a girl each time she is raped or forced to perform sexual acts for money.

In Nepal, the primary target of sexual slavery is young girls from minority groups and impoverished families. In 1996, governments from 122 nations and several NGOs met together

in Sweden and created the *Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action* against sexual exploitation of children. This document defined commercial sexual exploitation of children as “...a fundamental violation of children’s rights” in order to place emphasis on the human rights abuses of sexual slavery rather than merely a “loss of innocence” (First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children 1996). Furthermore, according to the *Stockholm Declaration*, sexual slavery involves sexual abuse by an adult and some form of payment when one is “treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object,” which essentially involves pressure and forced acts amounting to a “contemporary form of slavery.” While past advocacy efforts have been concerned with protecting the welfare of women and children, those approaches have largely been enacted to protect childhood innocence rather than directly addressing the issue of human rights abuse through sexual slavery. Nepal’s government and the international community have yet to target sexual slavery as a nationwide human rights abuse. New efforts by the State and NGOs must adopt a multifaceted approach to address the varied factors that contribute to sexual slavery.

Ongoing academic debates surrounding sexual slavery reveal two perspectives regarding environmental influences that perpetuate sexual exploitation. One perspective, represented by Hughes (2000) and Joffres, Christine, Mills, and Edward (2008) among others, conceptualizes sexual slavery as having a singular cause. While identifying one contributing factor to target in the fight to end sexual enslavement could be useful, continuing failures of contemporary efforts reveal that this simplified approach is ineffective. The theoretical framework of this study aligns with an alternative perspective, represented by Zhang (2007), Masci (2004), and Kara (2009), that attributes cause to a complex web of factors that facilitate sexual enslavement. I will show

that economic, socio-cultural, and political factors contribute to modern-day human exploitation, and gender-based discrimination works within each of these factors to perpetuate sexual enslavement of girls in Nepal. Economic factors are those components associated with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Socio-cultural factors include components of a society such as family structure, religion, and traditions. Political factors are those areas relating to the government and the legislation of policies. An example of how economic, socio-cultural, and political factors work together to create an environment that facilitates sexual slavery can be seen within the Badi caste of Nepal.

The Badi caste has a long history of forced sex-work which is a tradition that runs through generations of families. Nepal, as a predominantly Hindu nation, is structured by castes in which people are born into a social class that restricts their occupations and associations within the caste (Cox 1992). Historically, the Badi are considered the prostitute caste, providing sexual services for Hindu priests, political leaders, and other people in power (Joffres, et al. 2008). To many in the Badi community, sex-work may not be considered “forced” as it is a way of life. However, Badi girls fulfill a familial role as the income generator in the family by participating in sex-work. Hence, in my opinion, this group represents the epitome of sexual slavery for profit. Parents and powerful members of the Badi community tell the girls, “prostitution is and always has been the work of women in the Badi caste, and to aspire to any other profession would be unrealistic” (Cox 1992, 52). Mothers socialize their daughters to “prostitute” themselves for financial income (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009).

In order to better understand the motivations for continued sex-work among the Badi, it is important to examine their economic situation. The economy of Nepal presents a desperately

impoverished condition overall. According to the World Bank (2006), Nepal is the poorest country in South Asia and the twelfth poorest nation in the world. Prostitution is normalized within the Badi community as they have little opportunity to generate income and therefore ensure the livelihoods of their families in occupations other than those dictated by their economic status and caste. Suggesting that a daughter engage in sex-work for income no longer seems like a choice but an obligation in order to relieve the burdens of poverty (Mam 2008). Additionally, when a daughter becomes a prostitute, pressures on a poor family include the prospects of one less mouth to feed, hope of a better life, and the belief that the daughter will send money home if she engages in sex-work (Masci 2004). Thus, children become vulnerable to continued sexual slavery simply because they pose an economic burden in already financially destitute areas that accept sexual exploitation of girls.

Even outside the Badi caste, sexual slavery is common to relieve the economic burdens of debt, low wages, and lack of jobs. In rural areas of Nepal that have relied on agriculture and self-sustenance for years, families are now economically marginalized in a developing country where industrialization takes place in the urban areas and creates gaps in development whereby those in rural areas become increasingly impoverished (The World Bank 2006). This unequal market development in impoverished countries creates shadow economies where criminal networks take advantage of the poverty of those areas untouched by economic development (Hughes 2000). When a country's market system fails to meet the needs of its citizens, shadow economies arise to generate income and supply goods and services to meet those needs. Moneylenders, who provide families with credit in their efforts to escape poverty, are closely tied with brothels and will approach families with the option of surrendering a

daughter as collateral for debt (Kara 2009). The poor conditions promoted by this desperately chaotic economy facilitate a deeply interconnected system of extortionists and organized crime. Sex slavery victims themselves receive no pay from their forced labor because the money goes to pay brothel owners, then moneylenders, and sometimes their families.

Economic factors are a driving force for families to allow children to enter situations of sexual slavery, but socio-cultural factors normalize such behavior to perpetuate exploitation. In the case of the Badi, their economic options are constrained by their social status in society and their presumed occupations as song and dance entertainers. The occupation of an entertainer transitioned into the occupation of a prostitute for young girls in the Badi caste. Although Nepali women are perceived as inferior to men based on expectations of women's roles of submission, ironically, the birth of a girl in the Badi community is actually celebrated because she will bring more financial security to the family (Cox 1992). While this perspective may appear to elevate women, it actually reveals the pre-existing gender-bias. Donna Hughes (2000), a member of the U.S. National Institute of Justice, explains that women and children do not benefit from the demand of their bodies, and this gendered demand creates a market where pimps use extreme violence to dominate women. Hughes further argues that gendered demand results from a structural inequality that exists throughout the world between men and women.

Socio-cultural factors that facilitate sexual slavery in Nepal are based on the prevalence of attitudes of male superiority that demands compliance of women and children and promotes gender discrimination (Parrot and Cummings 2008, Hughes 2000). Beyond the Badi caste, gender discrimination exists throughout Nepal's patriarchal society where families teach girls to

comply with the demands of men. This translates to allowing men to have their way while, “ideally, ...a woman walks so quietly you can’t hear her footsteps” (Mam 2008, 28). The cultural norm is the legitimation of gender-based discrimination which manifests in human rights abuses, the worst manifestation of which is commodification through sexual slavery. Outside the home, Nepali men dominate the political system where men can create laws and policies to ensure their power is unhindered.

Personal experience of gender discrimination further socializes and internalizes the notion that women occupy an inferior status within society. In poor rural areas of Nepal, little is done to stop abuse against women; therefore, it seems permissible for a man to beat his wife, rape his daughter, and allow his brother to do the same. Women learn that they have little worth in their culture other than to be used by men for sexual experiences. Comments from women suffering in slavery reveal a reluctant resignation to these cultural practices: “...this is our culture, men want women as slaves” (Kara 2009, 78). Somaly Mam (2008, 116), who knows first-hand the trauma of sexual slavery, reflects on her experiences, “If you are a girl, you owe obedience to your parents. If your family requires you to sell your body on the side of the road so that your younger brother can go to school... that is what you do.”

Male demand for commercial sex is socialized from a young age which furthers the patriarchy within this socio-cultural context. Boys “learn” that they should have control over women’s sexuality, and this control is maintained through necessary and acceptable violence (Poudel and Carryer 2000). In fact, the act of visiting a brothel in South Asia is often a group experience where males bond through mutual experiences of sexual control over girls and women, and most boys have their first sexual experience in a brothel (Bernstein 2005).

However, raising children in such a manner that “half of them think themselves superior by biology” stifles the motivations of both sexes (Kristof and WuDunn 2009). Such an approach reduces both male and female to sexual beings whose identity is tied merely to their gender-based sexual roles. Thus, the socio-cultural environment of Nepal disadvantages women, and both men and women alike abide by cultural cues that accept abuses against women at the hands of “superior” men.

As economic factors create a context that drives motivations for sexual slavery and socio-cultural factors normalize sexual slavery within society, political factors help to institutionalize gender discrimination and, therefore, sexual slavery. Nepal’s government is ranked number 26 on the 2011 Failed States Index of 177 countries. This measure takes into account poverty, legitimacy of the state, rule of law, security, and human rights abuses to show how stable or unstable a country and its government was throughout the year. Additionally, Nepal received a score of 2.2 out of 10 on the Corruption Perception Index of 2011. This Index rates governments from 0 (most corrupt) to 10 (least corrupt) based on its citizens’ perceptions of the country’s governance, acceptance of disorder, embezzlement, and effectiveness of the public sector. Nepal’s rankings in both of these Indexes reveal that its capacity for stability is relatively low; therefore, it is not surprising that Nepal’s government is not politically prepared to tackle the human rights abuse of sexual slavery and trafficking that is taking place within and across its borders.

There are weaknesses in the government’s approach to ending sexual exploitation among the Badi. In fact, Nepal’s government has historically considered the Badi caste an embarrassment to society because of their identity as the “prostitute caste” (Cox 1992). Since

2005, at the pressure of the international community, Nepal's government has made nominal efforts to provide alternative means of income for the Badi in an attempt to change their public identity. Failure in this front leads to the current situation where the government minimizes the situation rather than addresses the inherent flaws within the social structure of society.

Bureaucrats have deliberated over the situation of the Badi for nearly a decade, but in 2012 the Minister of Culture said, "We hope to grant them full rights as soon as possible" (Parajuli 2012).

While government spokespeople give lip-service to human rights advocates, governmental policies continue to discriminate against the Badi in many ways. The most important issue pertains to citizenship and national identity. The Badi are considered an internally displaced people group as many of them cannot prove their citizenship, and Nepal maintains policies that make it difficult for women in rural areas to obtain citizenship. Citizenship in Nepal depends on "blood rights," but individuals must apply for citizenship and can only do so when he or she reaches the age of 16 (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009, 269). There is also an additional provision that the individual's father must have been a citizen when the individual was born in order to obtain citizenship. "[A] mother is not considered on a par with her husband in terms of being able to confer citizenship to her child" (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009, 269). This represents a major area of policy discrimination. A father or husband needs to approve a woman's application for citizenship (Nepal Citizenship Act, 2020 [1964] 1964). Conversely, a boy does not need his father's permission to file for citizenship. Without citizenship, disenfranchisement weakens political rights and protections, and Badi girls can become vulnerable for use and profit through sexual slavery. The *Dalit Uplift Group Coordination Committee*, an advocacy group in Nepal that fights for the rights of lower castes,

began campaigning for the land ownership and citizenship rights of the Badi in 2007. According to a recent article featured by an Italian organization active in Asia, progress has been made regarding the rights of the Badi: in April 2012, Nepal's government made the first allowance for a single Badi woman to own land (Parajuli 2012).

An additional political factor that influences sexual enslavement of girls in Nepal is the complicity among traffickers, an extensive criminal network, and government authorities. The only way these criminal networks operate so freely is through the corruption and bribery of police and political officials. When children are abducted, families cannot turn to police officials for help to prosecute the criminals because the police often warn brothel owners of raids and request money in return for protection. Public officials also have a vested interest in facilitating and perpetuating the enslavement of girls because police officers may be regular customers at the local brothels (Zhang 2007). In Nepal's capital city of Kathmandu, the complicity between brothels may go even further as there have been reports of senior police and army officials co-owning some bars and massage parlors (U.S. Department of State 2011). In fact, Somaly Mam (2008), a former sex slave, describes how government officials are often the worst abusers of women as they can afford to pay for virgins and, therefore, are the first to rape and use girls sexually. Women and minority groups are subject to discriminatory policies and public officials who are major perpetrators of sexual exploitation. Political factors, including these discriminatory policies and the lack of government protection against human rights abuses, are the institutionalizing key within the three-pronged perspective on the context that facilitates sexual enslavement.

Economic, socio-cultural, and political aspects of the current situation within Nepal must be analyzed together in their roles of motivating, socializing, and institutionalizing gendered sexual abuse against women. Siddharth Kara (2009) notes that sexual slavery is like a mature, multinational corporation due to its steady growth and immense cash flows. Thus, governing parties can be easily swayed by the enormous impact this illegal practice has on the nation's economy, and women and children are easily exploited because of a structured bias against them within society as a whole. Although Nepal has made some attempts to combat trafficking, the multifaceted approach presented here needs to be acknowledged by policymakers and NGOs to combat sexual slavery by addressing culturally embedded discrimination. Nepal's recent attempts, as I will detail in the next section, have little impact on the overall situation of sexually enslaved girls, and I argue that this is likely due to a compartmentalized approach that ignores the larger context that facilitates ongoing exploitation of girls.

Failed Attempts

In 2001, Nepal's government committed to eliminating sexual exploitation of girls. Despite this commitment, efforts have overlooked non-citizens and minority groups which reside predominantly in rural areas within the country's borders. Since the Badi caste is a minority group and women within the caste face difficulty obtaining citizenship, this caste is rarely the recipient of any protective policies and programs that may be offered by the government. Additionally, existing policies and programs encompass rescuing and rehabilitating girls who have already been abducted, trafficked, or forced into situations of sexual slavery (KC, et al. 2001). Rescue efforts focus on brothel raids, inspecting vehicles at determined check

points, and placing sexually enslaved girls in safe houses. Rehabilitation efforts focus on providing therapy and occupational training for girls rescued from sexual slavery. While such actions are necessary, I argue that these are primarily reactive and not preventative. Below, I examine the general policy and programmatic efforts to fight sexual slavery within Nepal, and I discuss the underlying reasons for their lack of success.

Unsuccessful Policies

Nepal has policies that address sexual exploitation and slavery, but such policies are couched in language which actually discriminates against girls and women. Girls who have genuinely become victims of slavery through no fault of their own are presented as law-breakers who perpetuate prostitution. Even laws that are written with the intent to protect women and girls as victims have been described as “a soft glove covering a still punishing fist” (Chapkis 2005, 51). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s *Legal and Policy Review* reveals crucial flaws in legislation throughout South Asia including a lack of gender sensitivity which is especially evident through gaps in legal protection for victims and prosecution of offenders (Thomas 2011).

Ambiguous government policies like Nepal’s Interim Constitution of 2007 have been implemented in an effort to fight sexual slavery and trafficking, but these policies have been minimally enforced with little governmental backing to ensure the efficacy of such policies. Shared Hope International (2010), which works with victims of sex trafficking throughout the world, mentioned that although the Interim Constitution states that “No physical, mental or any other form of violence shall be inflicted to any woman,” and “Traffic in human beings,

slavery or serfdom is prohibited,” and that “Forced labor in any form is prohibited,” such statements do little to equip to current government and law enforcement to address the issue of sexual slavery. Additionally, the Trafficking in Persons and Transportation (Control) Act was enacted in 2007, stating that “all forms of trafficking are prohibited within Nepal,” punishable by imprisonment of up to 20 years as well as brothel customers punishable by imprisonment for one to three months. Although these policies may sound proactive, evidence of their effectiveness is lacking and reveals that the policies function merely as lip-service rather than a foundation for action and prevention. The 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report released by the U.S. Department of State notes that there are no protections for trafficked and enslaved victims who end up being arrested and charged as prostitutes. In 2010, there were only 12 convictions of traffickers in Nepal, showing a lack of prosecution among offenders (Bennett 2010).

Nepal’s current legal systems create and propagate a privileged status for men in the upper castes of society. There are several areas of legal policies that do not directly pertain to the treatment of women but affect the status of women through exclusionary language. For example, regarding property rights, policies are written that effect the treatment of women in society as a whole. Agathangelou (2004, 156) argues that “property relations institutionalize exploitation and violence in the neoliberal world economy.” When only male citizens are allowed to buy, sell, and exchange land and certain goods, then women are left vulnerable to become those consumed by the market rather than become consumers themselves. Nepal’s government creates barriers for women to own property and receive wages for employment (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009). Women are vulnerable to exploitation due to the

“constraints they face with regard to viable opportunities for earning a living” (Poudel and Smyth 2002, 84).

To ensure that policies are not written with gender discriminating language, women need to be recognized as, and allowed to be, full participators in the government. Therefore, new policy approaches will create gateways whereby women can be active at a decision-making level with regards to policies that affect families, communities, and the nation as a whole. The welfare of women in a country is directly related to their political voice within policy creation. Female legislators are able to offer a counterbalance to a patriarchal perspective. Women are more likely to think in terms of community benefits to the extent that their empowerment and elevation creates a ripple-effect in families and communities (Paulos 2006). This is not to say that women are better at fighting human rights abuses than men but that women, offering a unique perspective as policymakers, may be able to challenge policies that could indirectly foster sexual exploitation in ways that may otherwise be overlooked. For example, policies written to encourage tourism promotion and economic migration may facilitate sex trafficking through a sudden influx of foreign money and transportation routes. A female legislator who understands the experiences of her gender in society may be alert to this possibility (Samarasinghe 2003). While some scholars may be critical of Samarasinghe’s view of women as policymakers, the main purpose of this view is to promote representation of female and minority perspectives in policymaking discussions.

In 2001, a task force of Nepal’s government was charged with the responsibility of dealing with the issue of trafficking of women and children (SK 2010). So far, the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare has established a transit home and a center for training and

education for victims. These efforts for rescuing and rehabilitating victims of sex slavery are necessary advancements for Nepal's society; however, government efforts cannot stop here because this does little to inhibit the girls from ending up in brothels and forced sex work in the first place. In order to be truly successful, this Ministry needs to move beyond rehabilitation to strategic planning for a societal shift that will *prevent* sexual exploitation on a large scale. Similar to government policies that focus on rescuing and rehabilitating girls already involved in forced sex work, programs of the government, NGOs, and community-based organizations also focus predominantly on rescuing girls rather than on targeting the factors that perpetuate slavery.

Unsuccessful Programs

The majority of programs that existed in Nepal in 2011 as government-funded programs by NGOs to address sex slavery were focused on rescuing girls from brothels (U.S. Department of State 2011). The Trafficking in Persons Report (2011) noted that Nepal has eight rehabilitation shelter homes for victims and 15 emergency rescue shelters throughout the country run by NGOs. There were no recorded programs focused on prevention initiatives noted in the Report.

Maiti Nepal, the most well-known NGO in Nepal dedicated to the issue of sex slavery and abuses against women, operates safe houses for girls who have been rescued from brothels, and they have implemented programs to educate girls on the dangers of traffickers in villages. Children are taught to avoid strangers and families are taught to ignore the economic pressures of men promising jobs and money in exchange for the daughters. These programs

attempt to prevent trafficking and abuse against women by raising awareness in communities by targeting students and community leaders and educating them about the existence of trafficking (Maiti Nepal 2011). Such awareness programs in villages is one key part of combatting sexual exploitation; however, awareness simply gives someone the tools to make a decision but does not actually address the complex facilitators, including economic and socio-cultural pressures, that influence decisions. Training girls and families on the dangers of traffickers and the existence of sexual slavery implies that victims have power to say “no” before being sexually exploited (Poudel and Carryer 2000). In a society where there are little to no rights for women, girls cannot be expected to solve the problem of sexual exploitation simply by denying access to their bodies. Attention must be given to addressing the socio-cultural factors that influence girls’ agency and voice within society as a whole.

The shelter homes mentioned above assist with rescuing girls from sex slavery and then work to rehabilitate the girls so that they might be reintegrated into society through economic empowerment. Unfortunately, many of these homes focus on training in traditional skills such as block-printing, mat-weaving, candle-making, and stitching, which provide few opportunities for lasting economic stability (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009). The purpose of these trainings is more to fill time as part of a rehabilitation program rather than actual acclimation to the current marketplace apart from sex work. NGOs have been criticized for focusing on teaching traditional domestic skills that a woman will need for a domesticated lifestyle within the context of marriage and a home; however, they provide few alternatives to the traditional household setting and little assistance in overcoming the stigmatization that prevents women from entering marriage once they have been involved in sexual slavery (Richardson, Poudel and

Laurie 2009). Maiti Nepal (2011) recognizes that actual reintegration into society is nearly impossible considering the trauma endured by sexually enslaved victims and the societal stigma placed on former sex workers. Although rescue and rehabilitation programs are crucial for victims of sex slavery, these are not considered efforts to prevent and fight human rights abuses against women.

Nepal needs to take a national stance for women's rights to dignity and equality in order to fight the gender-based discrimination that exists in the economic, socio-cultural, and political structure of society (Hughes 2000). The effort to end sexual slavery cannot be merely an effort to rescue and rehabilitate women who have been sexually enslaved because this ignores major factors that contribute to the perpetuation of sexual slavery and the institutionalization of gender-based human rights abuses allowed by Nepal's government. Combating sexual slavery must involve prevention throughout the whole of society.

A New Approach

I believe that the status of women within Nepal's society must change in order to prevent the gender-based human rights abuses that are perpetuated against girls in Nepal today. A multifaceted approach to ending sex slavery first considers the overall system and context within which girls face discrimination and then involves methods to address the multidimensional factors that perpetuate sexual slavery. Cultural attitudes of gender discrimination can only change through the necessary components, but by no means the only components, of legislative leadership focused on justice for women and programs focused on community development through comprehensive and preventative education.

In order to address Nepal's cultural context within which women are enslaved, programmatic approaches must include community education designed for prevention rather than merely awareness. Young boys need to know the importance of protecting and valuing the girls and women in their lives. In contrast to some feminist perspectives that look at the problem of sexual slavery as a woman-only versus societal problem, a holistic approach seeks to resocialize both boys and girls in a way that prevents men from using sex as a tool of oppression within society. Bernstein (2005) argues that a man's desire for commercial sex is guided by a historical influence of the cultural and economic environment. Instead, young men need to learn from other men that sexual exploitation of women is not acceptable behavior. In order for a market for women to exist, there must be some level of tolerance in the community; therefore, men must begin to create a culture within communities that no longer tolerates exploitation of women (DEMAND n.d.).

From an economic perspective, the sale of girls' bodies for sex has both supply and demand components. Health and social science researchers argue that commercial sexual exploitation is a "demand-driven phenomenon" that seeks to maximize profit while driving down cost (Joffres, et al. 2008). In my perspective, Nepal's government can make headway in the fight against sexual slavery by directing policies towards minimizing the demand-side of sexual exploitation. Male demand for sex in brothels is a symptom of a patriarchal system that discriminates against women; therefore, policymakers and program creators must "understand the demand in all its ramifications" (Samarasinghe 2003, 101). With an abundance of poverty-stricken girls, costs are low when these girls can be taken from families at minimal expense to traffickers. Therefore, a multifaceted approach takes into account the need for economic

development to address poverty within rural communities. Families and girls who have occupational choices within their villages will have alternatives to the promises of income through sex work.

Since political corruption in Nepal fosters demand, aligned with this new approach for fighting sexual slavery is the need for law enforcement reform. Policy reform has implications for the socio-cultural factors that contribute to sex slavery. Since political factors institutionalize human rights abuses against women, it must be political actions that de-institutionalize these abuses and institute new societal perspectives. A first step towards political action includes implementing laws that protect women and girls while creating opportunities for women to assert political voice without fear of repercussions. Government agencies need to equip law enforcement officials with the training and tools to work towards justice within communities and society as a whole. Once policies are in place that establish and protect equal rights for women in Nepal, the former patriarchal customs and norms that accepted abuses against women can no longer be tolerated without legal action.

Conclusion

By analyzing the complex economic, socio-cultural, and political factors that perpetuate sexual slavery in Nepal, I have shown how current policy and program efforts fail to address these key factors, as well as the gender discrimination, that underlie the context of human rights abuses against women in Nepal. The government's current approaches address merely the symptoms of sex slavery while overlooking the context within the country that influences abuses against women. Current approaches fail to address the situation of the Badi caste and

minority groups within the country. Policies and programs currently in place are reactive and Nepal is joining a long history of policies and programs that maintain a “controlled” prostitution rather than combating and eliminating the exploitation and abuse of women and children (Limoncelli 2010). Current policies that focus primarily on rescue and rehabilitation *presuppose* the abuse and enslavement of women, but effective policies must be implemented that begin to transform the labor and economic systems rather than merely pacifying the status quo (Agathangelou 2004). My analysis of Nepal’s government in perpetuating human rights abuses against women reveals that the government cannot be part of the solution to combat sex slavery unless there is recognition of the state’s role in the overall acceptance of the gender-based discrimination of women. Recent decisions by Nepal’s government show that the political situation warrants a more in-depth analysis than can be given. For example, in December 2011, Nepal’s government closed the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, indicating major steps backwards in protecting human rights (Nepal: Backsliding on Rights 2012). Additionally, Human Rights Watch (2012), an independent organization dedicated to defending and protecting human rights, declared that “reports of lawlessness persist in many parts of the country, especially in the southern plains of the Terai and the eastern hills.”

The analytical approach I have taken to address the current situation in Nepal is useful for addressing larger societal issues that NGOs and the international community face in the midst of government acceptance and institutionalization of human rights abuses. By understanding the interconnected influences that create a context of oppression and abuse against women in Nepal, we can begin to see how an approach to combat sex slavery, and any

human rights abuse, must be multifaceted and requires involvement in the area of economic development, community education, and political reform. Women in Nepal face a complex web of factors that construct their position in society as inferior to men, and ultimately their experiences socialize society to accept gender-based discrimination. Through initiatives undertaken by NGOs that address gender discrimination as it exists economically, socio-culturally, and politically, women can hope for a day when sexual enslavement will not be accepted by society.

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