

Human trafficking in Russia: A sad reality of the society

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Abstract:

Trafficking is a severe issue not only for security reasons but also on humanitarian grounds. Some of the popular destinations for these victims are in Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe and North America. The disintegration of the Soviet Union exacerbated human trafficking cases. With time trafficking became worsen and it is hard to determine the exact number of trafficked victims that have gone abroad from Russia. Some causes, such as economic crisis, reduced employment, and travel restrictions, made it tough to get jobs lawfully and favored the traffickers to increase their illegal deeds in Russia. This paper will explore the trafficking issue and Russia's current situation that compel many for sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Key Words: Forced labor, Victim, Trafficking, Law, Security, Slavery, Human Rights.

Trafficking affects almost every country in the world and creates serious human threats. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the phenomenon has reached up to a more significant proportion. Economic transition of the country to a democratic society has brought both positive and negative consequences (Abazov, 2009). The growing economies have created disparities in income between various social groups and as the inequity grows, the poor became more vulnerable to human trafficking in an attempt to improve their economic situation(Kelly, 2005). Desire to find a more

promising and financially successful future that leads them to fall to trafficking. According to the United States Department of State (2012) report, Worldwide, there are an estimated 27 million modern-day slaves. Every year, thousands of men, women, and children prey to the traffickers in their own countries and abroad. It is either a country of origin, transit, or destination. Almost every country in the world has been affected by these crimes and it poses a grave human security threat. Human Trafficking can be defined as “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coerce, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (Article 3a, Palermo Protocol). The primary reasons for such a trend can be attributed to political, economic, and social factors that took place after the USSR's break, resulting in poverty and unemployment.

Human trafficking Statistics and route:

The U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report ranks Russia as a Tier 3 country, or one where the government does not meet the standards to eliminate trafficking. “The government decreased already minimal law enforcement efforts. It did not report comprehensive data on trafficking criminal cases, making it difficult to assess the adequacy or effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. Media reports and publicly available data revealed some details on trafficking cases investigated and prosecuted, including some conviction information, during the reporting period. However, the limited number of cases reported did not constitute an adequate law enforcement response compared with the scale of trafficking in Russia. Some publicly available data was likely duplicative or contradictory of information from other sources, as no single agency was responsible for maintaining comprehensive law enforcement statistics” (UNICEF 2006). In 2016, the Global Slavery Index reported that there were more than one million human trafficking victims in Russia. This is only the small part of a larger situation or problem that remains hidden.

As for as the Major routes of trafficking in Russia concern UNICEF 2006 reported stated that the Baltic route through Lithuania, as well as the Central European route through Warsaw and Prague,

are regarded as the easiest methods to transport illegal migrants to Germany, Scandinavia, and other European countries and the United States. Nonetheless, European countries and the United States remain the main destination countries for human trafficking out of Russia. Authorities mentioned that most illegal migrants, including women and children, have been transported via Georgia into Turkey, Greece and the Mediterranean countries for sexual and labor exploitation. Large resorts in Europe and Asia and armed conflict zones or regions where military and peacekeeping forces are stationed, in the later case primarily in the Balkans, are regarded as notable trafficking hubs for sexual exploitation of women. Routes through Egypt and into Israel, as well as other Middle East countries, are also common. In particular, many women and children are taken from the southern regions of European Russia to the UAE for sexual exploitation. Evidence of trafficking for labor exploitation has been found in countries with large Russian diasporas such as in Germany, Turkey, Portugal and other southern European states to which laborers are primarily transported for the harvest of citrus fruit and other agricultural work. China-bound human trafficking is divided into the China-Siberia and the China-Primorsky Region routes. In the early 1990s, Russia's policies to attract greater Chinese tourists and harbor good neighboring country relations resulted in a large influx of Chinese citizens settling in Russia's far east region. Russia is also a destination country for human trafficking routes from CIS countries and poor Asian regions. Almost all CIS states are involved in the trafficking of people into Russia as origin countries. The most vulnerable populations are those from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine. For all these countries, Russia is one of the main destination countries for human trafficking for the purpose of labor and sexual exploitation". Further reports said the dominant use of trafficking is labor, so traffickers concentrate most victims in larger cities, like Moscow and St. Petersburg. These areas have not only the large population to mask a victim's presence, but also house companies and factories where they can work. In short, the government is not taking substantial steps to combat trafficking (UNICEF report 2006).

Human Trafficking law:

The process of transition in the country worsened the economic situation of many women that led to far more family breakdowns, and opening of borders, and an increase in corruption. As far as government responses are concerned, the government is relatively slow to react to the growing problem of human trafficking. Corruption also plays a significant role within the government to

close eyes towards human trafficking. The major problem with the inadequate legal framework on human trafficking and the long process of implementing new human trafficking laws. The covert nature of human trade, the underdevelopment of the laws against trafficking, the strong reluctance of the victims to press charges and testify against their captors, and lenient sentences make it a lowrisk criminal activity with high profit margins (Yuliya V. Tverdova. 2010). So state governments need to be more strict in the context of the law.

Russia only has one law that bans human trafficking, passed in 2003 by Putin. Unfortunately, this law also not that much effective and does nothing other than label human trafficking illegal. UNICEF (2006) report mentioned that “Russia’s ratification of the Palermo Protocol in March 2004 underscores Russia’s willingness to combat human trafficking as prescribed by the Protocol’s provisions. Steps undertaken since the ratification of the Palermo Convention and Protocol have resulted in the establishment of new norms of criminal legislation outlawing human trafficking in

Law which criminalized trafficking in Russia: Article 127.1 and Article 127.2

Article 127.1 Trafficking in Human Beings

1. Trafficking in Human Beings, that is, a human being’s purchase and sale or his/her recruiting, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receiving for the purpose of his/her exploitation - shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of up to five years.
2. The same deed committed:
 - a) in respect of two or more persons;
 - b) in respect of a known minor;
 - c) by a person through his official position;
 - d) moving the victim across the State Border of the Russian Federation or illegally keeping him abroad;
 - e) using forged documents, as well as seizing, concealing or destroying the documents certifying the identity of the victim;
 - f) with application of force or with the threat of applying it;
 - g) for the purpose of cutting out the victim’s organs and tissues - shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term from three to ten years.
3. The deeds provided for by Parts One and Two of this Article:
 - a) which have entailed the victim’s death by negligence, the infliction of major damage to the victim’s health or other grave consequences;
 - b) committed in a way posing danger to the life or health of many people;
 - c) committed by an organised group - shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term from eight to fifteen years.

Commentary.

1. The person who has committed for the first time the deed provided for by Part One or Item "a" of Part Two of this Article, has voluntarily released the victim and has contributed to solving the crime shall be released from criminal liability, if there are no other formal components of a crime in his acts.
2. The exploitation of a person shall mean in this Article the use of the engagement in prostitution by other persons and other forms of sexual exploitation, slave labour (services), subjection, as well as seizure of his organ and tissues.

9. Report by E. B. Mizulina at the Academic Conference “New Criminal Law in Russia: Cooperation of Law Enforcement Authorities and NGOs in Combating Trafficking.” Nizhny Novgorod, 6-7 April 2005.; Interview with T.V. Kholschevnikova, Independent Expert.

Source: UNICEF report (2006)

Russia, articles 127.1 (trafficking in human beings) and 127.2 (use in slave labour)”. Articles 127.1 (trafficking in persons) and 127.2 (use of slave labor) of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Article 127.1 prescribed penalties of up to five years’ prison labor or up to six

years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult victims and three to 10 years' imprisonment for those involving a child victim. Article 127.2 prescribed penalties of up to five years' prison labor or up to five years' imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim, and up to five years' prison labor or three to 10 years imprisonment for those involving a child victim.

Reasons for trafficking:

Several factors ranging from poverty, gender discrimination in education and health, employment opportunities and a hope for better living standards has resulted in attracted the vulnerable portion of the population to get trafficked. As far as major reasons for human trafficking are concerned, it is generally explored in the push and pull factor framework and then further exposed in a series from poverty, gender discrimination to better living prospects abroad. Regional and country studies on trafficking in post-Soviet countries often claim the transition process as the main reason for increased human trafficking (Hughes, 2002). The reasons can be described in the context of push and pull factor as follows:

Push factors: Literature of human trafficking often suggests other push factors such as a low level of socio-economic condition, high unemployment, underemployment, low income, lack of educational opportunities and inadequate healthcare facility. Gender discrimination in every sphere of life also plays a crucial role as a push factor for women to get trafficked. Through these discriminatory attitudes toward women that prevent them to utilise their chances, positions and limits their abilities and flexibility to explore new opportunities and alternative ways of life outside their prescribed roles as daughters, wives and mothers. In turn, this promotes risky behavior to explore any option available to them. Corruption is also a push factor preventing women from entering higher education or employment and, therefore, leaving them with a limited future prospective. After the introduction transition period, everyone was affected by it due to changes in economy, when few people gained, but most lost their works and additional jobs. The hardest hit by the economic transition were economically inactive and socially weak families with many children or workers with minimal rights (Lokar 2000). Women's social exclusion and inequalities during the transition period lead to a special kind of vulnerability that slightly differs, despite similarities, from the reasons for trafficking in men. Here we can add one another push factor of violence against women in the family and surrounding society. Combined with the existing

vulnerabilities, other social ills such as corruption, violence, and terrorism deprive a woman from accessing education, employment, or social services. Women are often helped to bypass migration laws with the help of the traffickers to cross borders by giving a bribe or getting necessary legal documents (Pearson 2001; Tavcer 2007).

Pull factor: Trafficking situation mainly based on the myths about rich foreign countries, the freedom abroad and the demands of the sex industries there. Another myth about to become rich abroad by taking the examples of women who made money in abroad and return to their place. Another significant factor is the freedom that women will get wealth in foreign countries and get rid of their family and societal boundaries. Even in some cases, they are attracted by high wages in the sex industry and entertainment sector out of the country. A large number of women get attracted into prostitution under false promises of higher salaried employment opportunities such as waitresses, dancers, and models. There are other shreds of evidence where young girls have been trapped in false love affairs and fictitious marriages to prospective bridegrooms outside the region. Sometimes religion and traditions also become a contributory factor in promoting sexual exploitation among the young ones. Usually, such cases are taken out of their homes to another city or country for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Traffickers are quick to take advantage of the vulnerable situation where the victim is not only dependent on the traffickers for employment but are also unaware about the dangers that surrounds all around them. Traffickers threaten victims to remain silent. Trafficking in women for sexual exploitation leads to some of the worst forms of health hazards, including social discrimination. Due to social and institutional rejection and discrimination, sexual violence, poverty, gender inequality, stigma and discrimination in law and practice, harmful cultural and religious practices, lack of access to credit, property, or inheritance rights many more other factors that contribute to their vulnerability such as war, political instability, economic migration and state fragility and fragmentation (Thieme and Siegman, 2010).

Other causes such as Gender division of work, more insecure and lower-paid informal employment, chiefly in domestic work, bad working conditions and their segregation by gender or caste, local code of behavior and increasing work burden make more vulnerable to trafficking. At the same time gender gap in the macroeconomy and gender division of labor are also contributory factors. Women get lesser legal, social or policy protection, which limits their ability to access credit, property, or inheritance rights. Social and cultural norms related to masculinity can also

mean vulnerability and sometimes violent behavior towards women and girls (Thieme and Siegman, 2010). Trafficking in women and girls is also due to the lack of social protection. Gender based discrimination, violence and low status of women and girls in the society created situations of severe vulnerabilities for sexual exploitation (Dutta, 2011). Women's social exclusion and inequalities during the transition period lead to a special kind of vulnerability that slightly differs, despite similarities, from the reasons for trafficking in men. Here we can add another push factor of violence against women in the family and surrounding society. Combined with the existing vulnerabilities, other social ills such as corruption, violence, and terrorism deprives a woman from accessing education, employment, or social services. Women are often helped to bypass migration laws with the help of the traffickers to cross borders by giving a bribe or getting necessary legal documents (Pearson 2001; Tavcer 2007). Human trafficking is a result of structural gender inequalities that make women part of the excluded and discriminated group. Poverty is a primary factor among the vulnerability to being trafficked. Population below the poverty line, labor status, and food security make women vulnerable to trafficking (Dutta, 2011). The vulnerability of women in rural areas because of the high unemployment rate forces women to search for income sources abroad.

Ilkaracan(2002) argues in his study that women who are unable to retain the standard of living they had experienced during the communist rule are often attracted to the idea of migration, especially since the new freedom of movement allows them to travel freely throughout the CIS zone. The global economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 has intensified the problem for countries in the transition phase affecting mainly the vulnerable group of the population in Central Asia. In some cases, the long working hours without pay, temporary or casual portions or threatening to fire workers, if they do not accept harsh working conditions and in that in a desperate situation many women may become victims of trafficking in fraud and other decisive methods as they may believe in and accept false promises, having no other option. Large profit from women trafficking is estimated 712 billion dollars, each year (Sulaimanova, 1996). Prostitution since if often is their only way of sustaining themselves and their families, because other jobs offered in job markets are poorly paid. Many of them seek to migrate from rural to urban areas or other countries in this grave economic condition. Among them, those with education and employment skills migrated to other countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Turkey, China, Germany, or the United Arab

Emirates. And this process has increased very significantly. The vulnerable group, such as women and girls from rural areas without much education and skills, is mostly exploited.

Challenges:

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the trafficking phenomenon remains a sad reality of society. Unfortunately, it is still hard to determine the exact number of trafficked victims that have suffered the trauma. Traffickers threaten victims to remain silent. Victims who are put to work against their will are often under deplorable and unsafe conditions and held captive by physical and psychological stress. Mainly the former victims of sexual exploitation themselves become brokers and recruiters within trafficking chains as they became part of the criminal networks (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Anna Sarah Langlois (2020) pointed out that, in recent years, there have been criminal cases against government officials for facilitating human trafficking in Russia. Many officers and executives allegedly accepted bribes from employers to halt investigations, protected traffickers and returned victims to their captors. Another problem is there is very little government funding or organizations for the rehabilitation and protection of victims. Most of the work to help victims happens through NGOs or international groups, such as the Russian Red Cross or Help Services for Nigerians in Russia. In 2019, the US State Department's 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report, TIP Report, gave Russia a failing report (Tier Three ranking) card in its efforts to eliminate human trafficking, placing Russia alongside countries like Burma, North Korea, South Sudan, and Syria. In conclusion, it can be said that Human trafficking is the most lucrative business in Russia, which is kept at a low profile, make it more challenging to catch traffickers. Tier Three ranking in the TIP Report tells the seriousness of trafficking in Russia and pinpoints a significant lack of effort to fight against trafficking by the government.

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