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# Sex trafficking of girls and women: Evidence from Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh

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## Abstract

A crucial gap in the trafficking literature from India is the dearth of primary data and micro studies that could be used for vulnerability mapping of the source areas and addressing the identified risk factors. The present paper is a small attempt to contribute to plugging the gap in the context of Andhra Pradesh, identified as a 'hot spot' in the trafficking literature. This paper is based on case studies of 78 women who had been trafficked from their places of origin in Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh to metropolitan cities across India and who have since returned to their homes. The paper attempted to identify the individual and family circumstances that contribute to the causes of trafficking, to highlight in particular the gendered vulnerabilities that set these women up for trafficking, and to capture the process of the trafficking experience. The findings of the study are located in the dynamic interplay of the social structural context and specificities of the district that contribute to causes of trafficking and the individual circumstances and agency of the women. The case studies reported in this paper are a pointer to the compelling urgency of interventions that will go beyond the forced/voluntary divide in trafficking and sex work.

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# Sex trafficking of girls and women: Evidence from Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh<sup>1</sup>

U.Vindhya and V. Swathi Dev

## Introduction

The problem of trafficking — of men, women, and children being recruited and moved within or across national borders without their consent and coerced into work against their will — is not new. But the term *trafficking* is of relatively recent usage and currency world wide, stemming primarily from the initiatives and efforts of international agencies and legislations, aimed at its prevention. Further, although the problem of trafficking has existed since centuries, the recognition of trafficking as an organized crime, as a violation of human rights and of women's rights in particular, is recent and in consonance with rights-based and feminist perspectives.

Although the scope of trafficking includes exploitation for labour of any kind (United Nations, 2000; Sen & Nair, 2004; Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Human Rights Commission, & National Commission for Women, 2007), any discussion of trafficking of girls and women is inextricably related to the movement of women for sexual exploitation and is therefore conflated with the much older term in use, *prostitution*<sup>2</sup>. It is for this reason that the term *sex trafficking* is explicitly used to refer to coercive or fraudulent means of inducing a person for commercial sexual exploitation. Since it is mostly girls and women who are targeted, the term *sex trafficking* has come to primarily refer to the sexual exploitation of girls and women (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). It is also for this reason that much of the anti-trafficking initiatives in the south Asian region in particular are focused on trafficking into prostitution.

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<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge our learnings from the discussions with Ms. P. Jamuna, State Project Manager (Gender), Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty, Hyderabad, who generously gave us access to the data reported in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The terms prostitution and sex work are used interchangeably despite the different origins and politics surrounding these terms (see Jeffreys, 2006 and Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998 for opposing view points on the nomenclature and their implications).

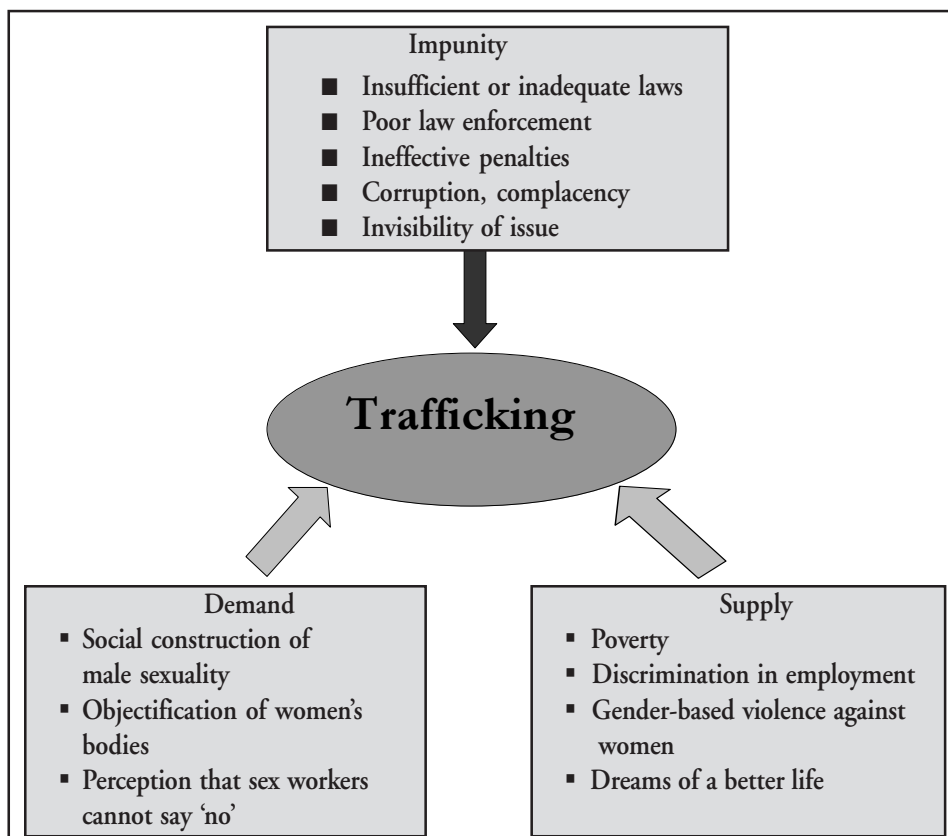
The trafficking of girls and women for sexual exploitation is viewed as a modern-day form of slavery in which they are induced through coercion and/or deception into providing commercial sexual services (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Despite the age-old institutionalization of prostitution, the contemporary context of trafficking is located in discussions of issues as wide-ranging as globalization, labour relations, migration, and sexuality (Berman, 2003; Munro, 2005; Segrave & Milivojevic, 2005). Trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation needs to be understood within the processes of gendered labor and migration patterns that have arisen under conditions of globalization, with the feminization of the low skilled, low wage workforce in particular simultaneously contributing to regional and international migration flows and to “women’s opportunity, ability and desire to migrate” (p.13, Segrave & Milivojevic, 2005). In the economies in transition in several Asian countries in particular, globalization and its offshoots have encouraged free mobility of capital, technology, and the spread of modernization with greater access to transport, media among others, but on the flip side, it has escalated poverty and gender disparities, led to erosion of traditional income sources and rural employment, pushing the poor and the unskilled to migrate in order to survive. Women and children in particular are placed in increasingly powerless situations, making them more vulnerable to trafficking (Asian Development Bank, 2003; Baruah, nd; D’Cunha, 2002; Huda, 2006; Kapur, 2002; Nag, 2006).

What is seen as contributing in recent years to increase in movement of women and women’s bodies for commercial sexual services and profit are the impacts of socio-economic developments stemming from the neo-liberal economic reforms that have triggered off a large-scale rural crisis in particular. These impacts have ranged from collapse of farm credit and markets, withdrawal of subsidies, decline in the sustainability of agricultural work, and large-scale rural displacement with consequent spilling over of legions of migrant workers to urban centres. The impact of structural-economic change in the agricultural sector is believed to have increased the proportion of casual workers, thereby demanding flexibility and mobility from the labour force. The growing casualization of female labour in recent years is in fact one major factor that is seen to have increased the vulnerability of women to trafficking (Asian Development Bank, 2003; Network against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, 2001). With erosion of traditional livelihood options and increasing feminization of poverty, and accompanying changes in social and cultural relations including the pursuit of alternative livelihood options by women themselves, they become prime targets of traffickers who offer them escape from their situation with promises of opportunities for a better life elsewhere. The worst victims have been those with less status, less education and skills and limited work options — women and girls from landless labour, small farmer or lower caste background in particular (Cockburn, 2006; Shah, 2006; Parker, 2006; Sharma, 2007).

While this is the case on the supply side, inadequacies in the law and in law enforcement have also contributed to an expansion in the trafficking trade and the getting away with impunity by the traffickers (Kapur, 2002; Sen & Nair, 2004; Nair, 2010).

The third angle is the demand aspect of trafficking for commercial sexual services that remains the least visible. The few research studies that have been done on the purchasers of these services who are mostly men, show that men's reasons for buying sex include a desire for sex without commitment or emotional involvement; the perception that they can ask a prostitute to "do anything," including acts they would hesitate to request from a regular partner; the belief, particularly among men without or separated from regular partners, that sex is necessary to their well-being — a basic need; and the feeling of power experienced in sexual encounters with prostitutes who are powerless to withhold or deny sexual access (Farley, 2004; Davidson 1996; ILO, 2006) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The Trafficking Triangle**



Source: Adapted from Women, Health and Development Program, Pan-American Health Organization

International estimates of trafficking are varied with little consensus, given the clandestine nature of the trade and the consequent difficulties in assessing the magnitude of the crime. Government estimates for India place the figure at around 2.8 million women trafficked for sexual exploitation with a growing demand for young girls, a demand that is said to be linked to the HIV epidemic and the consequent perception of customers of commercial sexual services that young virgin girls would be HIV-free (Government of India, 2008; Sen & Nair, 2004). Around 30 to 90 percent of women are under 18 years at the time of their entry into sex work (cited in Sen & Nair, 2004) pointing not only to the grave risks young girls are prone to but also are indicative of the notion of 'consent' to sex work being largely irrelevant.

The issue of providing accurate estimates of trafficked women is however not as much a concern since from all accounts the numbers are anyway large. Instead, what needs to be underscored is that the issue of trafficking of women is indisputably a social problem, a form of gender-based violence, and is implicated in discussions of women's human rights, and persistent gender inequalities. Both from research and interventionist points of view, the concern about trafficking of women needs then to be focused on generating more focused data, from specific regions, mapping the vulnerabilities that make the women prime targets for trafficking, documenting the process of trafficking and the human rights violations they are subjected in the process. Given the current focus on the issue of trafficking, there is abundant literature on the means and process of trafficking world-wide as well as in the south Asian countries in particular. Despite the proliferation of studies however, we do still need region-specific and locally-contextualized data that will yield theoretical and empirical insights, and lead to relevant policy interventions.

Indeed, a crucial gap in the literature from India is identified as the paucity of primary data and the lack of micro studies that could be used for vulnerability mapping of the source areas and addressing the risk factors identified (Sen & Nair, 2004; Nair, 2010). The present paper is a small attempt to contribute to plugging the gap in the context of Andhra Pradesh, identified as a 'hot spot' in the trafficking literature.

### *Key objectives of the study*

This paper is based on case studies of 78 women who had been trafficked from their places of origin in Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh to metropolitan cities across India and who have since returned to their homes either through state intervention, or their own initiative, or through efforts of non-governmental organizations. The aim of this paper is to identify the individual and family circumstances that contribute to the causes of trafficking, to highlight in particular the gendered vulnerabilities that set these women up for trafficking, and to capture the process of the trafficking experience.

high rankings among all the districts in the human development and gender development indices (Project Parivartan, 2007; International Center for Research on Women and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2010). The apparent incongruities in the former and the latter sets of data are a pointer to the need for more region-specific data wherein causes and vulnerabilities to trafficking can be analyzed and interpreted with reference to the region. One major research question that prompted examining of the case study data reported in this paper was to see if there would be any difference between a rescued sample such as in the present study and current sex workers sampled in an earlier study recently undertaken by the first author in three other districts in AP (International Center on Research on Women and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2010).

But before going on to the findings of the study, a brief discussion of some of the conceptual issues and debates centred on what constitutes trafficking is presented in order to call attention to the complexities involved in this issue.

#### *Some conceptual issues associated with trafficking*

The culmination of several decades of efforts to legislate trafficking by international agencies such as the United Nations was the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children that came into force in 2003. This protocol, also known as the Palermo Protocol, is said to be the first major international intervention to address trafficking based on an expanded understanding of the term.

The Protocol defines trafficking as follows.

Article 3 (a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of 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 labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(United Nations, 2000)

Trafficking is recognized in this definition as linked with prostitution, but what is important is that this instrument sought to encompass all non-consensual, economic-exploitative, slavery like conditions and relations of work and life at any stage in the

under servile and exploitative working conditions, patterns that are common to trafficking. The exporting of house maids to the Gulf countries is an example of this trend. All the same, trafficking for prostitution constitutes the bulk of trafficking and the term 'sex trafficking' is often employed to denote this phenomenon in particular (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006; Trafficking in Persons Report, 2006).

On the other hand, while trafficking is intrinsically connected to prostitution, all prostitutes are not necessarily trafficked in the sense that some of them do make a choice to work in prostitution. Furthermore, within trafficking discourses, the situations of women and children are often discussed together with the result that women are infantilized and represented as having little agency and as being in need of paternalistic protection (Doezma, 2002).

While admittedly, interventions need to distinguish between the two groups and to recognize an adult woman's right to make her own decisions even if this includes, for example, deciding to engage in sex work, there is the larger question of to what extent is this choice an 'informed rational' one. Given the fact that an overwhelming majority of these women are from lower social and economic status (Dandona et al., 2006) with very limited opportunities for schooling or any other empowering resources and skills, and whose life circumstances are such that they are hardly likely to offer a range of options to choose from, the notions of choice and consent are indeed questionable in our society. The preconditions of *both* trafficking and sex work are essentially the same –the vulnerabilities of the women stemming primarily from economic and social structures, while the consequences of both encompass violations of a range of human rights and exposure to serious risks such as violence, health concerns including HIV, criminalization, marginalization, exclusion from civil and labour rights, as well as the experience of stigma and ostracism from local communities (D'Cunha, 2002).

Therefore even if sex work is to be regarded as work, as claimed by advocates of sex worker organizations, the conditions of work including the "ever-present occupational risks in prostitution such as violence, exposure to health-related concerns, criminalization, marginalization, exclusion from civil and labor rights and ostracism from local communities place sex work on a different and unequal footing in relation to economic, social and cultural practices of the mainstream labour market" (p. 321, Sanders, 2005).

The issue of trafficking and illegal migration is only partially relevant to the Indian context since India is a country with high levels of trafficking *within* its borders (India Country Report, 2008) although there are large numbers of women and girls from Nepal and Bangladesh trafficked *into* Indian cities (Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwari, Patel, Willis & Raj, 2007). Data on India as a major international supply

Prevention Act (ITPA) criminalizes offences of selling, procuring and exploiting any person for sex work. It prescribes severe penalties for trafficking and brothel owners, and supports rescue and rehabilitation schemes for sex workers. Section 8 of ITPA criminalizes solicitation for sex work which has been used to arrest and punish victims of trafficking. Section 15 authorizes mandatory HIV testing of arrested sex workers without consent (UNDP, 2007). The ambiguity is further compounded with the law allowing for the eviction of sex workers from their residence on the grounds of “public interest” (Misra, Mahal, & Shah, 2000).

The Indian state’s policy approach, theoretically at least, is aimed at balancing between the view that sex work is immoral, and that the rights of sex workers ought to be protected. In practice however, state policy has been influenced by the dominant view that sex work is immoral (Misra, Mahal, & Shah, 2000) since its purpose is to inhibit or abolish commercialized vice which the ITPA defines as trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution as an organized means of living (Protection Project, 2002).

The ITPA has been criticized on a number of counts and has been redrafted in order to move it away from victimizing the victim and ensuring that the traffickers and the customers are punished strictly. The amendments to ITPA include redefinition of the age of the child from 16 to 18 years, deletion of sections which re-victimize the victims, in-camera court proceedings for safeguarding privacy of the victims, enhanced punishment for traffickers, brothel keepers and pimps, punishment for persons who visit brothels for commercial sexual exploitation, definition of ‘trafficking’ adopted from the UN Protocol, and setting up of centre and state nodal authorities for coordination, investigation, rescue, rehabilitation, judicial support, research and training (Government of India, 2008)

In 2006 the Ministry of Home Affairs established anti-trafficking offices called Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) responsible for analyzing data, identifying causes, monitoring actions by state governments and meeting with state-level law enforcement agencies to check human trafficking across national and state borders. In 2007 five states were identified and selected as project states for implementation of the AHTU plan and AP was one of these states along with West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra and Goa (Government of India, 2008).

Interventions in AP as in the other high-risk states have been two-pronged – *prevention efforts* including sensitization and awareness campaigns through community vigilance committees and regional networks, media; gainful employment programmes and alternative livelihood training; self-regulatory boards to prevent forcible entry and trafficking of minors; prevention of second generation trafficking; and law enforcement;

2007). In recent years, the entry and the fairly widespread presence of international HIV/AIDS organizations in India since the 1990s signaled the reality of HIV as a significant health issue and the identification of sex workers as vectors of the disease and of sex trafficking as one of the factors furthering the heterosexual spread of HIV/AIDS (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007). Consequently, there has been an increase in intervention programmes for sex workers to deal with sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS and to enable them to negotiate safer sexual contacts (Chattopadhyay & McKaig, 2004; Greenall, 2007; Project Parivartan, 2007; Samuels, Pelto, Verma, & George, 2006). In states like AP, the expansion of funded health and HIV programmes targeting sex workers has thrown the debate of trafficking vis-à-vis sex work into the open with a sharper focus (George, Vindhya & Ray, 2010).

## Method

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 78 women who had been trafficked, rescued through police raids and interventions by local non-governmental organizations, or who had come out through their own initiative. Some of them had spent some time or were currently living in the shelter homes run by these organizations, or in the state-supported *Swaadhar* homes for trafficked and victimized women and some had since returned to their villages. All of them belonged to different villages in Kadiri *mandal*<sup>3</sup> in Anantapur district.

The case studies of the trafficked women were written by (women) members of the Social Action Committees set up by the community-based organizations (CBOs) under the auspices of the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) of the government of Andhra Pradesh. SERP implements the World Bank-sponsored Indira Kranthi Patham (IKP) whose main objective is poverty reduction but it also has a major gender mandate. This project seeks to reach out to the poor through a four-tiered institutional and human capacity building initiative of CBOs for facilitating and strengthening of self managed institutions of the poor – self-help groups (SHG), village organizations (VO), *mandal samakhya*<sup>4</sup> (MS) and finally, *zilla*<sup>5</sup> *samakhya* (ZS). SHGs of women have been established in 22 districts across the state. With a total corpus of about Rs. 3000 crores, the SHGs have by now well-established roots — 28 per cent of total SHGs in India are in AP alone — and a specific gender intervention and sensitization programme.

Under this programme, SHG women have formed Social Action Committees as a support system at the *mandal* and village level. The primary task of these committees is

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<sup>3</sup> Administrative division

<sup>4</sup> Collective

<sup>5</sup> District

### Locale of the study

The district of Anantapur is one of the four districts in the Rayalaseema region in the state of AP and the largest in terms of area in the state. Rayalaseema is historically known as the 'stalking ground of famines' and Anantapur district identified as the worst affected among the drought-prone districts and economically the most vulnerable part of AP. With an extremely unequal landholding pattern, only five percent of the land is irrigated. The frequent occurrence of drought, prolonged dry spells and repeated crop failures are said to have a devastating impact on the agricultural economy of the district (Reddy, 2006a). Given the conditions of the drought-prone terrain and paucity of work opportunities, the district has high levels of migration.

The human development and the human poverty indices of the districts in the state give the district a rank of 20 out of 23 districts in A.P. while the gender development index gives it a ranking of 19 (Government of Andhra Pradesh and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2007). The gender indicators are uniformly low, with the female literacy rate at only 28 per cent, much lower than the state average of 33 per cent, and the sex ratio is strikingly the lowest in the state at 946 (Census of India, 2001).

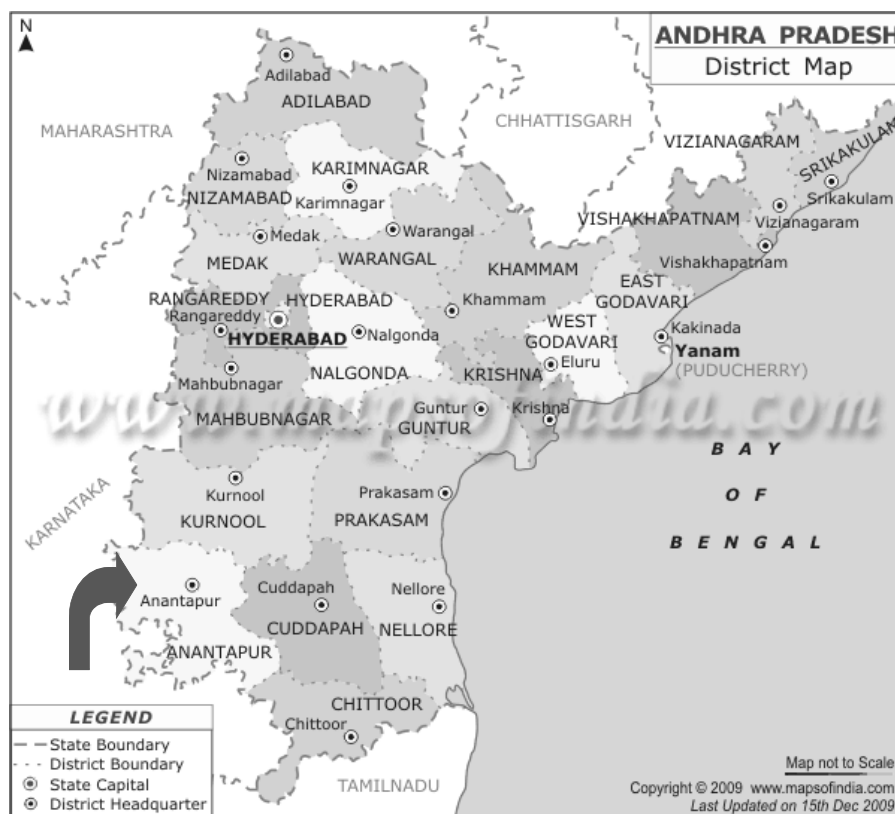
Figure 3



used for recruitment, whether transported to another place and how; details of their *trafficking experience* – where were they taken to, the abuse they were subjected to, who rescued them and how did they return to their homes; their *current occupation* and finally, their perceptions of their *current position*.

Since these ‘reporters’ were from their villages or nearby villages, the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent was egalitarian, in contrast to the conventional hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. The erasure of the power imbalance and a degree of similarity in cultural background and familiarity helped the respondents to open up easily. Furthermore, the reputation and credibility of the ‘reporters’ in raising issues of gender discrimination and inequities in the village, and in being identified as potential sources of assistance and counsel to the women, could have also helped in offsetting possible negative consequences of disclosure such as stigma and discrimination.

Figure 2



The district also has the notoriety of a high incidence of sexual violence including rape and sexual assault, and abduction of women by ‘factions’ or gangs of armed hoodlums in the service of men with affiliations across political parties.

Of the 63 *mandals* in the district, Kadiri and Puttaparthi *mandals* are the ones that reportedly have high levels of trafficking, with women being transported to brothels in distant places like Delhi and Mumbai. Trafficking is particularly reported to be high among the *Sugalis* (also known as *Banjaras* or *Lambadas* in other districts of AP), a semi-nomadic tribe which is the most numerous in Anantapur district compared to other districts in the state (Reddy, 2006b).

## Findings

### *Socio-demographic profile of the trafficked women*

The following table gives a picture of the socio-demographic profile of the women who had been trafficked – their current age, caste, religion, marital status, and children. There was no information available on the age of the women when they had been trafficked, and although this is a vital piece of information that is missing, the present age particulars also are revealing. A majority of them are in the 18-24 age group, pointing to the high-risk nature of this group, but what is also distressing is that 7 of them are still under 18 years of age indicating that they were all minors when they had been trafficked.

The caste composition of the women reveals that 72 per cent of the women together belonged principally to the Backward Castes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, indicating the sources of vulnerability once again. Although the Hindus among the respondents were the majority, 13 of them were Muslim (about 17 per cent). Regarding the marital status of the women, a majority of them were either from the ‘unmarried’ category or had been abandoned/separated or widowed. It is this category of women whose economic need and vulnerability seems to have been exploited by the traffickers.

The socio-demographic profile (*Table 1*) and the graph (*Figure 4*) below depicting the multiple gendered vulnerabilities that the women have experienced, bring out different dimensions of the supply aspect of trafficking.

### *Mapping gendered vulnerabilities*

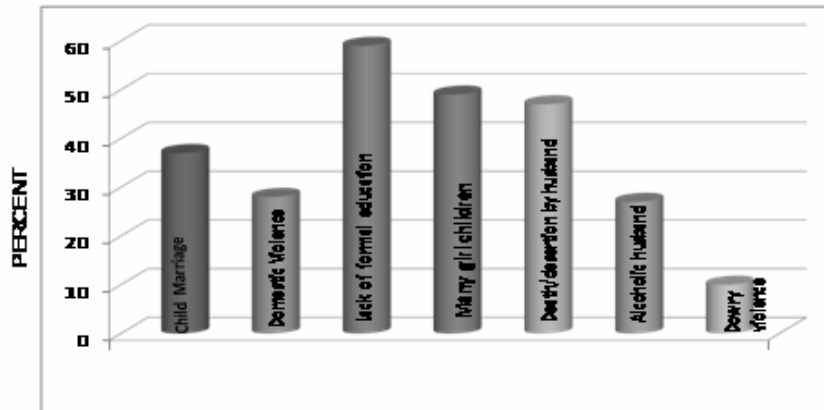
Lack of formal education, the composition of the family in terms of many girl children, (and the consequent perception that girl children are dispensable/are a burden to the family) and the desertion/abandonment/death of husband appear to be the three most significant gendered vulnerability factors in the women’s lives. This finding is yet an-

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the trafficked women

Present age	N
< 18 years	7
18-24	38
25-31	21
32-38	8
> 39 years	3
Not known	1
<b>Caste</b>	
Backward castes	26
Scheduled castes	13
Scheduled tribes	17
Upper castes	8
Not known	1
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	64
Muslim	13
Not known	1
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single (Unmarried)	29
Married	15
Divorced/separated/widowed/abandoned	34
<b>Children</b>	
Yes	19
No	59

other reinforcement of the by now well-established pattern of gender-based discrimination, perpetuated and institutionalized in the family and community. Lack of formal education condemns girls and women to low-skilled labour and restricts options for alternative income-generating opportunities. The perception of girl children being seen as burden to their families and the practice of selling young minor girls by the families themselves to traffickers, a practice noted to be common among the *Sugali* tribe in particular (Reddy, 2006a) is an indictment of the complicity of families in the entire trafficking process. Lack of status within the family and community, combined with little or no education implies that the women are by and large unaware of their rights or entitlements to protection from the law, either when they are threatened or otherwise coerced by the traffickers, or even when they return to their homes. The latter point will be elaborated in the section on the findings of the pattern of 'rehabilitation' that the women went through.

Figure 4: Gendered vulnerabilities



### *Elements of trafficking*

Despite the overlaps with sex work, discussed in an earlier section, the elements that constitute the trafficking process are clearly stated in the UN Protocol. Basing on these elements (*Table 2*), the case studies were examined to identify to what extent these aspects were present in the women's lives and experiences.

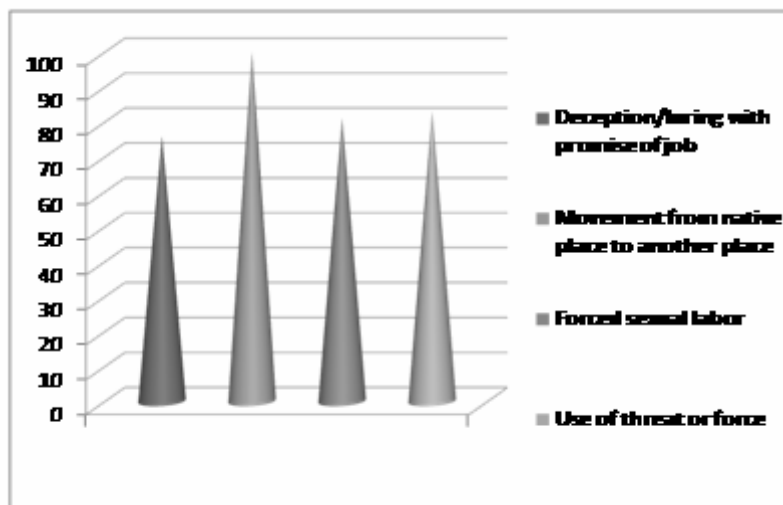
Table 2: Activities, means, and intention in trafficking

Activities (any of these)	Means/methods (any of these)	Purpose/Intention (any of these)
Recruitment	Threat	For exploitation including the following:
Transportation	Force	Prostitution of others
Transfer	Other forms of coercion	Other forms of sexual exploitation
Harbouring	Abduction	Forced labour or services
Receipt of persons	Fraud	Slavery or similar practices
	Deception	Servitude
	Abuse of	
	— Power	
	— Position of vulnerability	
	Giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve consent	

Source: Adapted from Nair (2010)

As can be seen from the graph below (*Figure 5*), all of the elements – deception, movement, forced sexual labour, and the use of threat/force – occurred in overwhelmingly large measure in the women’s lives. All these elements were found to be present in different stages of the trafficking process – from the time the women are identified on the basis of their economic need and social vulnerabilities, then deceived into being trafficked through promises of job/work elsewhere, in most cases, next transported from their native village to distant cities, held captive in the city brothels by using force and threats of being killed, and coerced into sexual labour by the brothel keepers, the customers or both. The narratives of an overwhelming majority of these women contained explicit stories of how beginning with inducements and promises of a better life elsewhere, the women found themselves trapped in a vortex of abuse, and abject living conditions. Underlying these narratives is however the strong motivation propelling them to seek out opportunities for work, to migrate to alien lands if necessary to realize these opportunities, only to discover the chasm between their aspirations and the reality transpiring subsequently.

Figure 5: Elements of Trafficking



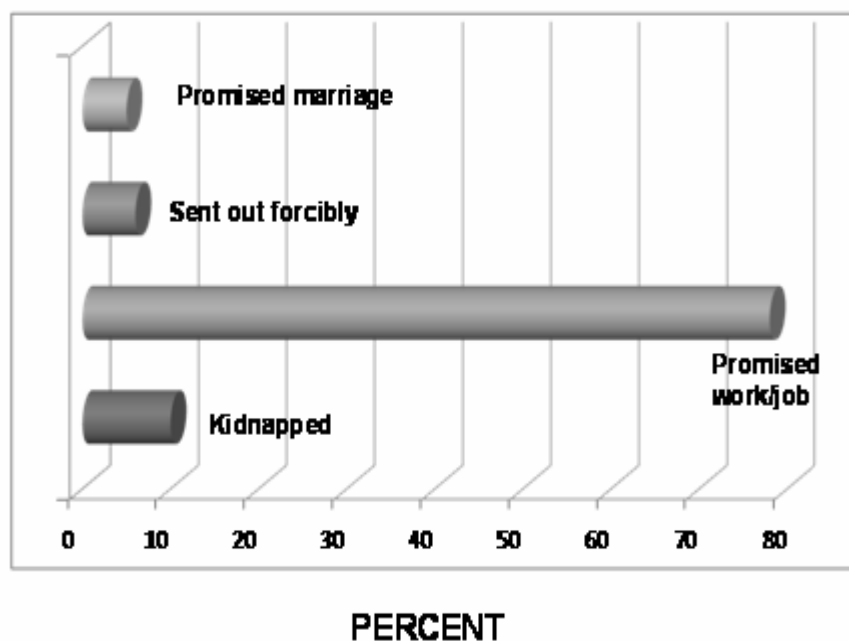
### *Strategies of recruiting*

As the graph below indicates, it was the luring for work/job that was the most used stratagem by the traffickers, reinforcing the economic compulsions of the women and the consequent readiness to an extent to move to other places for work. Given the trafficking awareness campaigns launched both by the state and by NGOs, the efforts of the community vigilance committees established by the government as part of its anti-trafficking intervention programmes, the ‘word of mouth’ publicity associated with

earlier instances of trafficked women and their subsequent plight, did not the women have any idea of what was in store for them when they were approached by the traffickers? Barring those cases of women who had been kidnapped and taken away forcibly, or those who were promised marriage, or those minor girls who had been sold by their families, the rest of the women, who in fact constituted the large majority, had been promised work. Twenty four of the 78 women had been promised a job of domestic help in cities such as Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Mysore; 21 of them had been simply offered “work” without any further details in distant places such as Kuwait, Dubai, Delhi and Mumbai. Thirteen of them were promised specific work opportunities in places like biscuit factory, hotel, textile shop, tailoring establishment, and as construction labour in cities such as Chennai, Pune and Bangalore.

These patterns reveal and accentuate trends noticed in the migration literature (Thapan, 2006; Agrawal, 2006). On the one hand, it is poverty and lack of livelihood options that drives women to seek out opportunities, for sustaining themselves and their families. On the other hand, it is not only that these opportunities consist of a concentration of jobs in the informal sector marked by a gendered division of labour, but also that the ‘offer’ of such jobs is enough to induce the women to assent to move elsewhere.

Figure 6: Methods of Trafficking



To respond to the question raised earlier whether the women had any notion of what the work was, or to which place they were being taken to, the answer is not apparent directly in the narratives. Further, given the label and image of ‘the trafficked woman’ whose experiences are read only in terms of coercion and victimization, the women could have been, and understandably so, reluctant to reveal anything that is likely to be interpreted as ‘consent’ to the entire process. A sense of unease – of having listened to the trafficker and been somewhat convinced by the promise/offer made — was however evident in some of the statements made by women as for instance, in the following excerpts.

*My life is ruined because I listened to others’ words. No one should go through what I experienced.*

*I spoiled my life by listening to others. I spoiled 100 years of life in lust of money. No one should be deceived by others like me. So I’m narrating my experience to others.*

In nine cases, the complicity of the family, including parents or the husband was clear as they were in league with the traffickers and were directly involved in either sale and/or forcibly pushing the girl out from home.

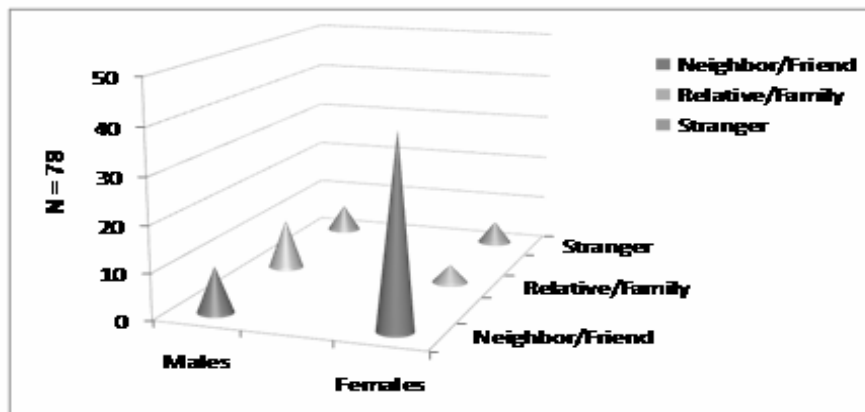
In areas where poverty has already limited people’s choices, discrimination against women in education, employment and wages can leave them with very few options for supporting themselves and their families. Dreaming of a better life in the city, they become vulnerable to traffickers’ false promises of jobs. Even though women might feel uneasy about the travel circumstances, despair over their current prospects, hope for a new life and for a way out of their current misery can outweigh any sense of danger. In this way poverty and gender inequality create a large pool of potential and seemingly willing “recruits.”

#### *Relationship to trafficker*

The identity of the trafficker, a large majority of whom was made up of either a (female) neighbour or friend shows that the networks of social bonds and social support ostensibly extending help and succour in terms of need play a crucial role in identifying vulnerable women and in capitalizing on their distress. Whether these networks are part of organized criminal mafias we cannot tell, but what is clearly evident is that these procurers do have links with the receiving agents at the destination place, whether it is brothel keepers or other agents in distant cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

The fact that most of the locations from where the women were actually trafficked were their homes (*Figure 8*) is evidence of the proximity and close affinity that they shared with the traffickers. The location of the home as the trafficking point indicates that the

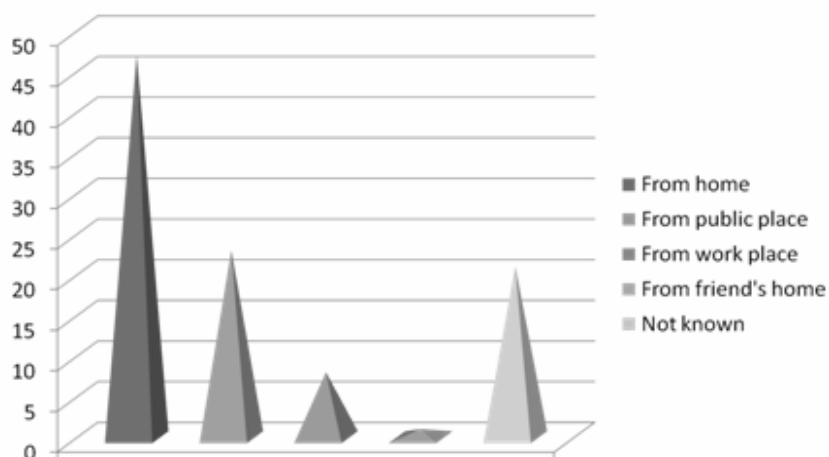
Figure 7: Relationship and gender of trafficker



woman left home along with the trafficker after she was apparently convinced that she was being taken to another place for work. In some cases, where the girl was sold by her family, the trafficker took her from her home, despite her resistance. The public place pointed out in the graph refers to streets, bus stands, and railway stations from where the women were abducted, sedated and transported to brothels in Delhi, Mumbai or Pune. In most cases, these abductions were carried out by members of the family (father-in-law, brother-in-law) and the woman was unaware of their designs. The workplace location indicates that it was the woman's colleague/co worker who had broached the idea of better work opportunities elsewhere and that in most cases the woman did not inform her family about her plans or whereabouts.

Figure 8: The Trafficking location

**Trafficking Location**



*Destination points*

The map below indicates the destination places that the women were taken to, although some of them were told they were being taken for work to some other city. The fact that the women who were all from different villages in Kadiri *mandal* were transported to three locations only – Delhi, Mumbai and Pune – could mean that some organized links of procuring and transportation have been established between the traffickers located in these villages with receiving agents in those cities.

Figure 9: Destination points of women trafficked from Anantapur district



*Destination points to Delhi, Mumbai and Pune*

### *Duration of being trafficked and process of rescue*

The duration of the trafficking experience of the women (*Figure 10*) shows that the majority of the women had returned within two years, rebutting the common argument made that women in sex work, regardless of how they got into it, get habituated to the money, the accompanying life style and find it difficult to get back to their earlier circumstances.

**Figure 10: Duration of trafficking**

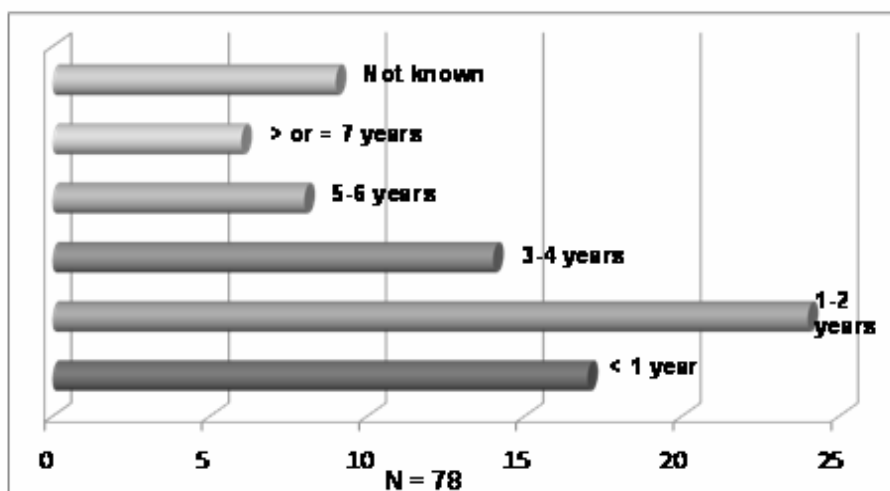


Figure 11 shows the manner in which the women were rescued and it is significant to note that the majority came out of the trafficked situation on their own initiative, taking the help of the other women in the brothel. Although the number of women who were taken out of the brothel through police raid, and some times with the intervention of both the police and NGOs from Anantapur district is large, it was still less than those who extricated themselves on their own initiative. The column 'brothel madam asked to leave' refers to those women who had contracted HIV and therefore were no longer 'profitable'.

### *Earlier and current occupation*

The table below shows the earlier and present occupation of the women and what is of significance is that although most women returned to resume their previous occupation of daily wage labourer either in agriculture or in construction sites, a fairly large number had also joined collectives such as SHGs. From the fact that 15 of the 78 women who had been trafficked are now part of the SHGs along with being daily wage labourers and three of them were working in NGOs it may be deduced that these collectives could be crucial forms of social support and social capital.

Figure 11: Process of rescue from trafficking

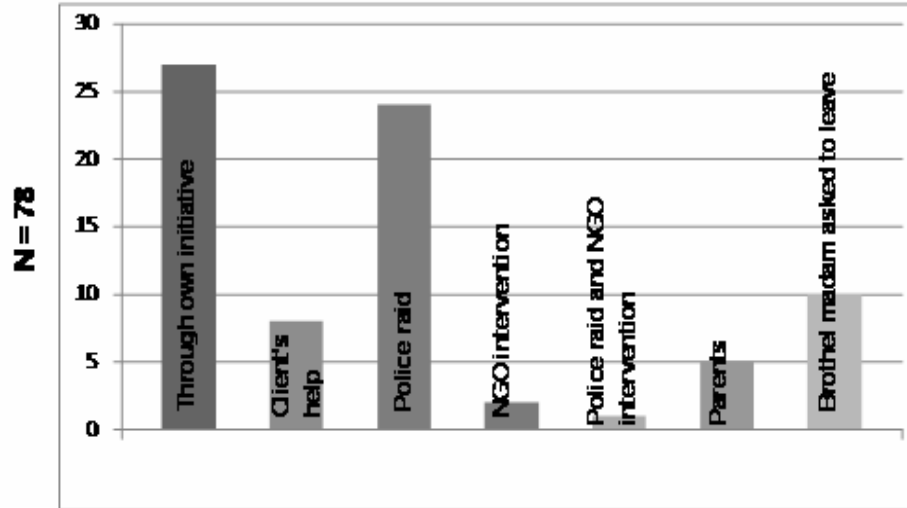


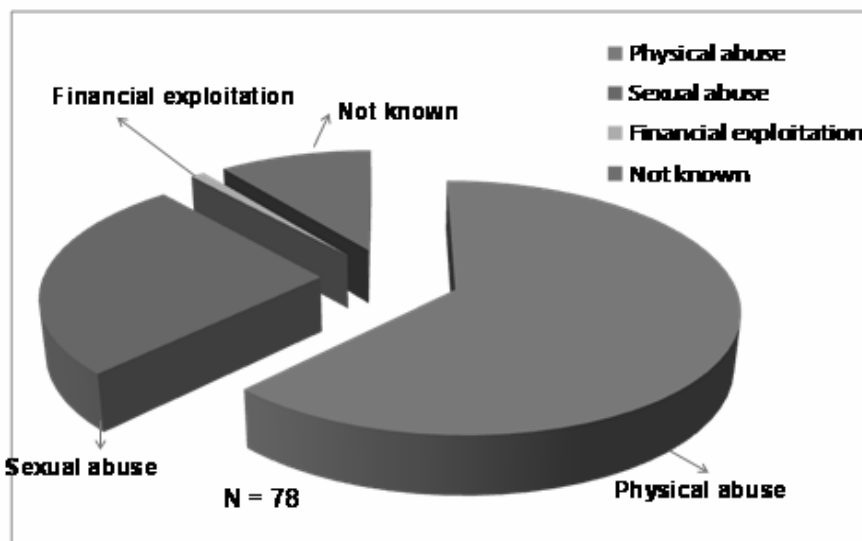
Table 4: Earlier and current occupation

Earlier		Trafficking experience	Current	
Daily wage laborer	51		Daily wage laborer	30
Domestic help	2	Domestic help	1	
Student	3	Student	1	
Not working	6	Not working	6	
Washerwoman	1	Tailoring	5	
Drama artist	1	Petty business	3	
Member in SHG	1	Member of NGO	3	
Not known	13	Member of SHG	15	
		<i>Swaadhar</i> home	11	
		Salesgirl	1	
		Not known	13	

*Trafficking experience: Life in the brothel*

All the narratives contained retelling of the women's experiences in the brothels, of details of abuse and servitude that they underwent. While physical and sexual abuse were understandably the most frequently reported experiences, they are indicative of the multiple human rights violations they were subjected to, including the deprivation of their rights to liberty and freedom of movement, dignity, and bodily integrity (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Types of abuse and exploitation



The following excerpts from the narratives are a telling pointer to the manifold abuses the women experienced.

*For one whole year, I was kept imprisoned by the 'sethani' (brothel madam), I was not allowed to even step out of the threshold. Every day I had to put on make up and she forced me to go to at least 30 men per day... If I did not listen to what the 'sethani' said, she would beat me up. If I did not listen to what the customers asked me to do, they used to slice me with knife cuts all over my body.*

*I was once sent to an 'english man'. He wounded my body by biting me because I did not listen to him. He forced himself on me even when I had bleeding injuries. I had to entertain 100 clients per day. By the end of the day I should give 100 tokens to 'sethani'. The money that was given by clients was collected by 'sethani' only. 25 women who were staying in the brothel house were forced to serve clients in the same room. Drunken customers abuse in different ways. Customers used to force for oral sex. I had to tolerate this kind of torture; otherwise they used to scratch me with blade all over my body. If I did not do as these violent customers asked me to, 'sethani' would beat me. 'Sethani' wrote 5 years agreement instead of 1 year agreement as she told us initially. She forced me to consume all types of drugs. She forced me to serve customers even during my menstrual periods.*

*I was forced to be in my under garments only. When I refused the 'gharwali' kept me locked up in the bathroom for 10 days... She said that every day 10 customers would*

*come and that I would have to be nice to them otherwise she would parcel my body home.*

*I was forced to wear a small skirt and short blouse and beaten severely when I refused to wear such clothes. I was not provided food due to my unwillingness to serve clients. She beat me severely if a client complained about non-cooperation. She made the police also beat me up. I was forced to serve customers even during menstruation periods. Once I could not serve clients due to fever and she beat me for that. When my family members called me up, I was forced not to complain about my situation.*

*Forced me to drink alcohol and sent to a room to serve clients.*

*Brothel madam forced me to put on make up and confined me to a room and forced me to earn Rs.40,000/- in a month. When she found that I was falling short by Rs.10,000/- her husband beat me and broke my leg.*

*I was forced to put one make-up and sit on the road along with other women and asked to call men 'oye'. When I refused, she beat me up severely. I was forced to serve many clients for long hours and to take tablets for abortion.*

*As I'm a beautiful girl many customers used to choose me. Sometimes I used to hide in bathroom to escape from them. Brothel madam then used to beat me with a stick through the window and made me to serve clients. I was forced to serve 50-100 clients per day. I used to earn Rs.5000/- to 10,000/- per day. Brothel madam did not provide food and water if money was less than that.*

From the testimonies of the women it is clear that violence and threats of violence as means of initiation, intimidation, punishment, and control are not only commonly used but are ever present in the women's lives. The physical, psychological and sexual trauma and violence that these women experienced undoubtedly echo similar experiences reported elsewhere in the literature and in this sense are not surprising. The restrictions on movement, the conditions of sexual exploitation, the debt bondage, and the situation of dependence on the traffickers for food, money, clothes and other necessities are all constitutive of human rights violations which leads us to say that for these women at least, sex work cannot be a vocational choice, but only a desecration of human rights.

The following table provides excerpts from the respondents' narratives regarding their perceptions/views on their present life and circumstances. The twenty statements in the table give us a glimpse of the pain and agony they went through, the relief experienced now, and the choice they have exercised in escaping from the trafficking world and

resume a life on their own terms, and also their views/perspectives on forced sex work, an aspect on which there is not much literature. It may be relevant here to point out that only 13 of the 78 women reported receiving the government aid of Rs. 10,000 for rehabilitation of trafficked victims.

**Table 5: Perceptions of comparison of present life with earlier life**

<i>Life here is still better than the living hell I experienced in the brothel.</i>
<i>It's better to face very difficult situations in the village rather than going out.</i>
<i>Earlier, I never dared to dream about any change in my life style and my future.</i>
<i>I would like to die rather than working like earlier.</i>
<i>I have decided not to listen to anyone throughout my life and vowed that I should not be deceived by others. It is better to die than working as a sex worker.</i>
<i>The age when every girl dreams about a good future was spoiled. No one comes forward to marry me. I do not have any hope for the future. Hence myself and people like me should fight and punish the culprits so that others will not go through a similar misfortune.</i>
<i>The torture by clients and brothel madam was 100 times more when compared to beatings by my father.</i>
<i>My life is ruined because I listened to others' words. No one should go through what I experienced.</i>
<i>I spoiled my life by listening to others. I spoiled 100 years of life in lust of money. No one should be deceived by others like me. So I'm narrating my experience to others.</i>
<i>We can sustain ourselves by sprinkling cow dung water in front of a few houses. I would like to kill the 'gharwali' (brothel madam) if she comes in front of me.</i>
<i>I want to stand on my own. I prefer to die rather than going back to Delhi. If I come across the person who sold me to the brothel I will inform the police.</i>
<i>I spent 5 years in hell. Now I'm working as a daily wage laborer.</i>
<i>Now I'm working as a helper in piece work, I do not want to go back to sex work again.</i>
<i>I don't want to go back to the brothel house not only this life but in my next life also I'm leading a happy life after coming out of the brothel house.</i>
<i>Now I'm leading a peaceful life as a daily wage laborer.</i>
<i>Now I'm leading a contented life.</i>
<i>If I'm alive I can live by selling salt rather than working in brothel.</i>
<i>I do not want work in a brothel again. I'm working as a daily wage laborer now.</i>
<i>I'm leading a happy life now.</i>

### **By way of conclusion: Contextualizing the findings**

The case studies reported in this paper provide primary data on the region-specific contexts for vulnerability and the logistics involved in trafficking young girls and women from Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh to metropolitan cities across India. The findings underline the role of poverty in sex trafficking, with a majority of them reporting being lured and deceived by traffickers through promises of economic opportunity and work. The predisposing factor of poverty has been highlighted in previous literature; the present study only further buttresses this known fact and is one more additional pointer to the urgency of policy interventions for poverty reduction.

However, poverty reduction alone as a one-stop solution may be fairly simplistic since the interaction between poverty and gendered vulnerabilities is the key precipitating factor in this context. The case studies reveal how gender-based mistreatment including denial or curtailment of formal educational opportunities, many girl children in the family, child marriage, and desertion/abandonment of husband served as proximal events related to the trafficking experience – both in the natal as well as in the marital family. It is critical that policy interventions take note of the institutionalized cultural practices and norms of the family that place young girls increasingly at risk for trafficking. It may be relevant here to cite a few findings from an earlier research project that the first author jointly conducted with the International Center of Research on Women in three other districts of AP, one of which was Chittoor district that is located in the same drought-prone region of Rayalaseema as Anantapur district is. For instance, it was found in interviews with current sex workers in these three districts that although a majority of them were initiated into sex work locally, that is, in their own villages or towns, the trend points to the more-preferred younger girls (less than 18 years) being sent to distant cities, (making it perhaps more difficult for them to escape and return), and also that this trend was more noticeable in the case of Chittoor district in comparison to the other two districts (International Center of Research on Women and Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2010).

The impact of the political economy of the region, marked by prolonged drought and lack of work opportunities and the consequent readiness of the women to migrate, combined with the disempowering factors associated with both gender and caste, have prepared the ground, so to speak, for trafficking. Indeed as several international agencies have alluded, trafficking is a complex development issue, an economic problem with vast numbers of women who are seeking to escape poverty being lured into trafficking by promises of economic gain (USAID, 1999).

Depiction of trafficking as non-consensual, with the image of the abducted young girl, bound and gagged, taken far from her home village and thrown into the dangers of

urban red light areas, and distinguishing it from other forms of migrations, has so far been the dominant trope in the trafficking literature, particularly in India (Shah, 2006). The gradation of coercion to consent seems however to be especially tricky, given the overlaps that trafficking has with sex work.

The international discourse on sex trafficking and sex work tends to view the women either as helpless 'victims' or those who do explore the element of 'choice' and the extent of agency they can exercise in their lives (George, Vindhya & Ray, 2010; Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Doezema, 1998; Evans et al., 2000; Jana et al., 2002; Jayasree, 2004; Saunders, 2005). As elucidated by the UN Protocol it is irrelevant to discuss obtaining consent from trafficked women for three reasons – a) consent is a continuous requirement; b) a large majority of trafficked women are cases of vulnerable victims; and c) it is impossible to consent to exploitation (Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007). Examining the life circumstances of women who have been trafficked, reported in this paper as well as of those in earlier literature, the discussion on consent, choice, and agency cannot be such a closed one as noted in the UN Protocol.

On the one hand, from the experiences reported in this paper by the trafficked women, a question that may be asked is whether it is at all possible to speak of agency and choice. Are they then passive victims, constantly manipulated by others, without any will to gain control over their lives? On the other hand, as seen from the life circumstances of these women, economic deprivation and the desire for a better life appear to motivate many women to voluntarily participate in some stages of trafficking. Evidence from earlier literature as well as from the present study suggest that motivation and the degree of deception behind sex trafficking depend on the social and cultural milieu of the women (Aghatise, 2004; Asian Development bank, 2003; Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwari, Patel, Willis & Raj, 2007). The degree of deception by the traffickers and the level of self-deception (through 'ignorance' about nature of the work) vary on a continuum from partial to complete and depend on vulnerabilities such as young age, deprived socio-economic circumstances, poor education, history of abuse and violence either in the parental home or in the marital home, all of which were seen in the lives of these women. While consent and choice seem rather fuzzy at the entry point, what is clear however is the decision of the women sampled in this study, based on their own agency to return to their earlier lives, albeit of poverty, but not with the degradation associated with the trafficking world.

There are virtually no studies in India examining the awareness of campaigns on sex trafficking, primarily because the introduction of anti-trafficking interventions is relatively recent. Although some data are available on the prevention and rehabilitation

efforts (e.g., DWCD, 2006) the impact of these state-sponsored initiatives has not been assessed systematically unlike the studied impact of the international NGO-funded HIV programming for sex workers. The case studies reported in this paper only point to the compelling urgency of interventions that will go beyond the forced/voluntary divide in trafficking and sex work.

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# Sex trafficking of girls and women: Evidence from Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh

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