

# Nepal's Helpless Women

*An Essay on Human Trafficking in Nepal*

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Reporting from Ghorahi, Nepal —

The scrubbing, cooking and sweeping started as early as 3 a.m. When the landlord's children awoke hours later, the 9-year-old girl got them ready for a school she could only dream of attending.

Afternoons and evenings were spent cutting hay and tending animals. Around 10 p.m., she'd collapse for a few hours before starting again, seven days a week.

Every January or February she'd see her family for a week, only to watch her father "sell" her back into another year of drudgery for a mere \$25. Although some of her friends spent most of their childhood this way, she was lucky: A civic group persuaded her parents to end the arrangement after three years.

For generations, ethnic Tharu girls as young as 6 have been handed over to landlords and brokers under a bondage system known as *kamlari*. The legacy of crushing poverty, caste and intergenerational debt has left many of the young victims scarred by sexual and emotional abuse.

Mark Magnier, Los Angeles

Times , December 28, 2010

Trafficking is when a woman or young girl is sold into slavery, most notably for sexual desires. Over 10,000 girls, ages 9-16, from Nepal are sold into slavery a year. Most of whom are sold into brothels in India <sup>(1)</sup>Tim McGirck , “Nepal’s Lost Daughters, India’s Soiled Goods,” *Nepal/ India News*, 27 January 1997. Women all over the world are being treated like lowly slaves, to be taken advantage of, used, and thrown away. When women are treated this way all over the world, it sends the message that women are a lower form of life than men. It is commonly thought that women are only made for the whims and pleasures of men. This is not true and needs to be stopped. When young boys grow up to learn that women are not important for anything other than what they want, the cycle continues into eternity. These women are treated worse than the dirt under men’s feet and one day there will be no one to help the men, no one to clean up after them and make sure they are content. What will people do then? We don’t need to wait until it is too late. The next generation needs to know that it is not okay to treat people, male or female, this way. Section One will discuss the

statistics of the problem. Section Two will address the health and mental consequences of the girls. Section Three will give examples of what is being done to stop these atrocities.

### **Part I: Scope of the Problem**

More than 200,000 Nepalese girls are involved in the Indian sex trade<sup>(1)</sup>. Parents sell their daughters and husbands sell their unwanted wives for up to \$600 US dollars. They can be bought for as low as a water buffalo or as 'high' as a video recorder<sup>(1)</sup>. Every year between 5,000 and 7,000 girls are sold into the areas of ill repute in India; many of whom are between 9 and 10 years old. The majority of girls who are sold into prostitution or as house slaves are sent to India. Many are starved and beaten into submission and taught through 'training', videos, and repeated rapes to service up to 25 patrons a day<sup>(2)</sup> Soma Wadhwa, "For Sale Childhood," Outlook, 1998. Some say the cause is due to the fact that it is easier to smuggle humans over the borders than it is to smuggle narcotics or electronics. In some cases, Police are paid by the 'brokers' to be 'blind' of the situations<sup>(2)</sup>. The trafficking of the women has many more consequences for the women than the actual brokers.

### **Part II: Mental and Physical Consequences**

Nepalese women and girls who have been subject to prostitution are very vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's). They can not leave the brothels until they pay off their 'debt' and by that time they are usually sick, with

either the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Tuberculosis, or have children of their own<sup>(2)</sup>. The women are forced into having unprotected sex with the clients, without regard to their health. Once they become infected with HIV, the women are abandoned and no longer useful to the people who bought them, and they are not wanted by their family.<sup>(3)</sup> (Robert Hardman, "Prince brings hope to Nepal's rescued sex slaves," *London Telegraph*, 9 February 1998). Other than infections and disease, the women are abused physically and mentally<sup>(4)</sup> (Joshi SK. Violence against women in Nepal: Role of health care workers. *Kathmandu Univ Med J (KUMJ)* 2009). A higher rate of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was found in women who had been trafficked rather than voluntary prostitution<sup>(5)</sup> (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Roxburgh, Degenhardt, & Copeland, 2006). HIV was very prevalent in the sex workers group<sup>(6)</sup> (A. Tsutsumi et al. / *Social Science & Medicine* 66 (2008) 1841-1847). Many of the women had high levels of depression. Other than the mental health issues, the women also experience physical beatings and rapes during the actual trafficking. The survivors are more prone to anxiety and depression than trafficked not for sexual reasons<sup>(6)</sup>. Nepal's government is working to stop this from continuing.

### **Part III: What is being done:**

The Nepal government has made somewhat of an effort to stop the trafficking of women and children. There is a Nepal National Day against Human Trafficking. Many laws have been passed to help stem the flow of women and young girls. The National Legal Code of 1963 states that it is an offence to

separate a minor younger than 16 yrs old to cross the a border “ with the intent of trafficking or striking a deal”<sup>(7)</sup> Kathmandu Univ. Medical Journal, Vol.8, No. 1, Issue 29, 3-4. The Human Trafficking Control Act of 1986 states that 20 yrs. in prison is a consequence of taking a women across borders with the intent of forcing her into prostitution<sup>(7)</sup>. These laws are not going to help if they are not enforced. As it was stated earlier in the essay, many of the police are bribed into looking the other way. With people like this, how can we ever hope to control such a monstrosity like the trafficking of women and children? The Ministry of Women and Social Welfare has set up “transit homes” for the victims of the Nepalese-Indian sex trade<sup>(7)</sup>. There are Katmandu-based NGO (Non-Governmental Agency) shelters for the victims of human trafficking.

**Conclusion:**

As you can infer from the information presented above, the sale and forced prostitution of women is an ongoing problem in Nepal. With times like these, we can't afford to let people get away with terrible acts like this and we can't allow our children to grow up subject to such inhuman actions. We need to teach our children to love all people and to treat one another fairly.

## References

- <sup>(1)</sup> (Tim McGirck , “Nepal’s Lost Daughters, India’s Soiled Goods,” *Nepal/ India News*, 27 January 1997).
- <sup>(2)</sup> (Soma Wadhwa, “For Sale Childhood,” *Outlook*, 1998).
- <sup>(3)</sup> (Robert Hardman, “Prince brings hope to Nepal’s rescued sex slaves,” *London Telegraph*, 9 February 1998).
- <sup>(4)</sup> (Joshi SK. Violence against women in Nepal: Role of health care workers. *Kathmandu Univ Med J (KUMJ)* 2009).
- <sup>(5)</sup> (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Roxburgh, Degenhardt, & Copeland, 2006).
- <sup>(6)</sup> (A. Tsutsumi et al. / *Social Science & Medicine* 66 (2008) 1841-1847).
- <sup>(7)</sup> (Kathmandu Univ. Medical Journal, Vol.8, No. 1, Issue 29, 3-4.)