

Raid, rescue, and rehabilitation: An exploratory study of effective anti-trafficking interventions for the survivors of sex trafficking of brothel-based prostitution

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1 Background

India's stance on prostitution/sex trade is quite complex and multifaceted. The antiquity of sex trade is ancient in origin displaying immense variety and diversity in the forms of sex trade across the length and breadth of the country such as temple prostitution flourished in the southern states of Orissa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, tawaif system was common among the Mughal dominant territories, while the brothel-based prostitution proliferated in the trade capital of Delhi, and port cities of Calcutta, Mumbai and so on (Pandey, 2018). The prostitution was part and parcel of the Indian cultural milieu until the rise of the global movement against the white sex trade. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was huge outrage against the trade of white European women into prostitution against their wish and the movement came into thrust to 'protect' the white women from seduction and abduction by the 'other', and correct the women who had gone towards vice (Chetry & Pande, 2019). Being an imperial colony, this development gained momentum in India and suddenly prostitution/sex trade was viewed as evil with an urgent emphasis on the protection of the females in the sex trade. This abolitionist policy on prostitution was adopted by the makers of prostitution in independent India and hence, buying and sale of females for brothel-based prostitution was explicitly prohibited by the Constitution of India and is considered a serious offense. Gradually, provisions for punishment of the perpetrator were added through a wide range of laws, specific anti-trafficking acts, and the Indian Penal Code (Pandey, 2015). To illustrate, buying and selling or importation of girls for prostitution is explicitly prohibited. Section 366 A relates to procuring a girl child for sexual exploitation while Section 366 B penalizes importation of girls from a foreign country for sexual exploitation and any contravention of this provision is an offense punishable in accordance with the laws of the country (Pandey, 2018).

In fact, India was one of the earliest signatories to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949) and embraced its statutes within its domestic legal system through the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA) 1956, subsequently amended and renamed the Immoral Traffic in Persons Prevention Act (ITPPA) 1986 (Pandey, Tewari & Bhowmik, 2013). The ITPPA is the main legislative tool to prevent and combat the trafficking for the sex trade in India. Its prime objective is to inhibit/abolish commercialized vice i.e. traffic in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution as an organized means of living. The Act defines the terms "brothel," "child," "corrective institution," "prostitution," "protective home," "public place," "special police officer," and "trafficking officer." The ITPPA prohibits the engagement of minors or under eighteen children in brothel-based prostitution and provides for their mandatory removal from the brothels through raids and has extensive provisions for their mandatory rehabilitation and home reintegration. Interestingly, the ITPPA prohibits prostitution by

minors but does not explicitly prohibits prostitution. Similarly, the ITPPA prohibits the solicitation of clients for sex and solicitation has been criminalized through anti-nuisance and anti-solicitation laws that target street-based solicitation of sexual services in any public place, however, street prostitution is endured (Bhat, 2004; Ghosh, 2009; Judicial Handbook on Combating Trafficking on Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2006; Mohan, 2006; Regmi, 2006; Shah, 2006). This legal anomaly has had significant implications for the sex trade in India as the ITPPA provides for the rescue and removal of the minors from the brothels (Sec 16, ITPPA) but is silent on the fate of the other females engaged in prostitution and the response of the law enforcement machinery towards them. This ambiguity towards the sex trade has threatened the preventive provision of raids for the protection of the minors and jeopardized the rehabilitation assistance as for the survivors of brothel-based prostitution in the country.

2 Review of Literature

‘Rescue’ may be defined as the removal of the survivor of human trafficking from the trafficking situation using external intervention such as raids by law enforcement (Preble & Black, 2019). It implies a safe withdrawal of survivors from the place of exploitation. Generally, the rescue process is carried out by the police and law enforcement officials where the survivors are forcibly removed from the trafficking situation. While the “rehabilitation” implies restoration to a former state. In the context of trafficking, rehabilitation entails enabling the survivors to be free from the physical, emotional, and social impact that she has been subjected to as a result of abuse and exploitation (Sanlaap & Terre des Hommes, 2009, p. 11). Rehabilitation encompasses psychological, economic, physical, as well as socio-cultural redemption of a survivor (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003). The rehabilitation assistance must cater to the survivors need for medical assistance, psychological counseling, shelter and housing, skill/vocational training, legal assistance, and other vital necessities for an individual (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2008; Chaulagai, 2009; Pandey, 2015; Preble & Black, 2019). Rehabilitation programs are pivotal in facilitating the return of the survivors into their homes and communities hence rehabilitation programs for the survivors of ST must be tailor-made taking into consideration the age and background of the survivors of trafficking (Pandey, 2015).

The issues related to the rehabilitation of sex-trafficked females gained widespread attention in the year 1996 in India when a police raid in a red-light area of Mumbai led to the arrest of 538 minors trafficked into the brothels of Kamathipura (Mumbai). Out of the 538 minors, 218 were from Nepal, and the rest were from various states in India such as Maharashtra, West Bengal, and so on (Crawford, 2010; Locke, 2010). The multiple reports and testimonies from the rescued survivors revealed that the rescue did not have any aftercare plans and they were forced to move to different remand homes in Mumbai without needed care and protection (Buet, Bashford, & Basnyat, 2012). The police had a significant challenge in providing safe accommodation to this rescued cohort post-rescue. Moreover, legal restraints such as the determination of nationality as well as a location of the homes of the females implied that immediate repatriation of these local and Nepali survivors was not feasible. Consequently, the survivors were forced to stay in various remand homes for days without proper space and essential amenities. Later, in the year 1998 the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India formulated a national action plan for the prevention of trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of women. The plan entailed a detailed measure for the prevention, awareness-raising, economic empowerment, rescue, and rehabilitation of the girls and women in brothel-based prostitution (Sen & Nair, 2004).

In this backdrop, this exploratory study presents an overview of the rescue mechanism and post-trafficking service provisions for the child survivors of brothel-based prostitution in India using qualitative design. Since the prostitution by minors is prohibited by the laws of the land hence, the minors in this study are treated as 'trafficked' as per the recent Palermo Protocol². Henceforth, the term sex trafficking would be used to refer to the minors in brothel-based prostitution in this study. Similarly, in congruence to the United Nations Conventions on the rights of the Children 1989 the definition of children in ITPPA was amended until eighteen years of age (United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, 1989) and hence, all females below eighteen years of age are treated as children in prostitution which is a concern of this study. Thus, the term minors and children have been used interchangeably in this article.

3 Methods

This exploratory research is based on the empirical study of the 30 trafficked survivors rescued from the brothels in the red-light areas of Delhi from July to October 2014. The study has an exploratory-cum-descriptive research design and employs an inductive approach for generalization. The inductive design generates bottom-up theories to identify the patterns, categories, and themes present in the raw data. The participants were purposively sampled using a combination of convenience and snowball approaches. Multiple data sources were used to elicit essential information for the study. The primary research participants for the current study were the trafficked survivors. Second, the additional information was collected using the anthropological tenet of the 'key informants.' The key informants for the present study comprised of the superintendents of the shelter homes, the welfare officers, and other personnel, police, a government attorney, and staff from different Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) from Delhi and West Bengal (which has a similar red light context) and the parents of two survivors. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the primary tools of data collection. In addition, the case histories of the 22 trafficked survivors given by another NGO further added inputs on the phenomenon. This triangulation served to increase the credibility and representability of the research findings. All identifying materials were removed to preserve the confidentiality and the anonymity of the research participants, and the pseudonyms were employed to represent the narratives to support the emergent categories. The transcribed information from the field was analyzed using narratives.

3.1 Study Site and Population

A total of 30 survivors were selected for the purpose of data collection. They were rescued from different brothels from the red-light areas from the Garstin Bastion Road popularly known as the G B Road, New Delhi. The state-wise distribution of the participants could be read as West Bengal (14), Maharashtra (6), Delhi (2), Karnataka (4), Rajasthan (2), and the rest were from Uttar Pradesh. Sixteen of the participants reported their area of origin as rural while the rest belonged to the urban areas. Seven of the participants had no formal education, ten participants had primary schooling while the rest had attended secondary school. Twenty-four participants were single, five were married (5), while one was widowed. The youngest age at which trafficked was 14 years. Seventeen of the participants reported being trafficked in the age range of 14-16 years while thirteen of the participants belonged to the 16-18 years cohort. Since the shelter was for the minor cohort all the survivors except one were below eighteen years of age during the time of interview. The minimum duration of stay in the brothels was reported to be 15 days while the maximum period of stay was reported as 2.5

years. Almost all the participants belonged to the economically impoverished backgrounds except two.

4 Results

The thematic analysis of the narratives produced following emergent categories from the data:

4.1 Removal of the survivors from the brothels

The findings of the study reveal that the mandatory provision of the rescue of minors from the brothels has not been found to be effective. It is found that although these raids have been effective in the removal of the children from the brothels, yet flawed design interrupts the intervention process in several ways. The findings reveal that the survivors were completely unaware of the protective framework of these raids and hence, many survivors were quite bewildered about the rescue operations and were distressed with the entire rescue provisions. Due to the lack of awareness regarding the laws and their legal rights as the survivors of trafficking, they were sceptical of high handedness by the police and found the whole procedure frightening. One of the participants accused the police of complicity in the brothel business:

“They take the bribe. They take money from one hand and release the girls from the other hand [here the ‘girls’ refers to the trafficked survivors].”

The testimonies reflect that the survivors were quite hostile towards the police during the raids as many police personnel was frequent client base of the brothels. Hence, many of the survivors were doubtful regarding the raids and the implications of these raids on their future well-being. The response of the participants highlighted several dubious practices followed during the ‘raid and rescue’ where the police just removed a handful of the survivors from the brothels during the rescue and deliberately ignored the others leaving behind a large pool of the other cohort of the survivors.

The findings highlight that the raid and rescue were found to be violative of rights perspectives. The survivors were forcefully removed from the brothels and detained in the police station which is mostly managed by menfolk who have been specialized in the use of abusive and vulgar language besides being violent and rude. The participants complained that the police and other personnel often indulged in abusive behavior during the rescue operations. The atmosphere of the police stations further agitated the survivors leaving them distressed. Some of the participants were not satisfied with the behavior of the police during the rescue. A participant aged 16 years added:

“I don’t like the police. They are too bad. They brought us to the police station at nine in the morning but did not give us anything to eat. At four in the evening, they gave two small puris to eat [she sarcastically drew the size of the puri[s] with her hands which were too tiny in size].”

It is further found that the dubious anti-trafficking laws which do not explicitly prohibit prostitution but criminalize seduction or solicitation for the purpose of prostitution in any public place or within the sight of a public place has had a detrimental effect on the trafficking survivors in the country (Ghosh, 2009; Mohan, 2006). Section 8 of the ITPPA prohibits soliciting clients for sex and criminalizes all street-based solicitation for sexual services in any public place or within the sight of a public place or in such a manner as to be seen or heard from any public place (Ghosh, 2009). The narratives reveal that this provision is

frequently misused by the brothel owners as well as the police who frequently penalize the adults in prostitution while the brothel owners or pimps go scot-free with minimum punishment. The participants reported that the brothel owners threatened them of penal sanctions for solicitation. The data reveals that the police are often on the regular payroll of the brothel owners and hence, the raid and rescue are customary. In practice, the brothel owners receive minimal punishment, and prosecutions against them are very low which may act as a deterrent. Thus, the fundamental purpose of these 'raid and rescue' operations is not to protect the interests of the children, but to garner statistics for anti-trafficking interventions to be submitted to the government. Hence, they were repulsive to the police and other law enforcement bodies during the raids and rescue. Lack of awareness of legal entitlements made them suspicious of the rescue operations. Many of the participants accused that they were not allowed to collect their belongings during the rescue including their clothes, their savings, or other possessions that were forfeited in the brothels. Loss of the belongings and savings made them unhappy leading to resentment among them regarding the raids. One of the participants grumbled about the loss of her savings and other material possessions due to the raids during the interviews:

“My savings are there. Almost 6 thousand bucks are there. One of the customers gave me a mobile. Didi [Brothel madam is popularly referred to as 'didi,' a Hindi equivalent for the elder sister] told me that I could take everything before leaving for my home. Now all is lost.”

Another participant added:

“My belongings are there at the brothel, but nobody is ready to take me there.”

To conclude, the survivors were unhappy with the current mechanisms of the raids and rescue. They were dissatisfied with the behavior of the police during and after the rescue and were quite skeptical of the role of the police in raids and rescue due to the segment of the corrupt policemen who favor the brothel business thwarting the anti-trafficking interventions in the country.

4.2 Lack of information sharing

The findings of the study suggest that the lack of information sharing further disrupts the rescue and rehabilitation interventions for the protection of the survivors including their removal from the brothels, and their stay at the shelter homes. Most of the participants perceived these raids negatively due to the unawareness regarding the raids and the intended benefits of conforming to the police and law enforcement. Preliminary reflections reveal that most of the participants believed that these raids were carried out with the intent of punishment for being in the sex trade and believed that they would be prosecuted for the same. The coercive techniques used by the rescue officials during the raid operations further reinforced their views.

The lack of information sharing not only disrupted the raid and rescue operations but also affected the life of the participants at the shelter home. The narratives reveal that majority of the participants were unaware of the legal statutes on trafficking as well as their rights as the survivors of trafficking. Being ignorant about the intended benefits of the participation in the rehabilitation programs, the survivors were not found to be comfortable with their stay at these shelter homes. Furthermore, the participants had little idea about their future whereabouts such as the return and reintegration into their home and communities, and the

time it may involve. Consequently, they found their stay at the shelter homes as subsequent incarceration and remained frustrated. One of the participants, who after being trafficked, was promised a return to her home by the brothel owner within a year sadly replied:

“The madam at the brothel told me she would send me home after a year. When the police came, I grew happy that I will be able to reach home early, but they have again lodged me here. If I would have been in a brothel by now, I would have reached my home.”

Yet another participant who was unhappy with her incarceration in the shelter home reported:

“I grew scared upon seeing the police ...I thought they would send me to jail but the officials assured us not to be afraid, they will send us back to our homes shortly. It's been more than six months; I am getting frustrated here.”

In the absence of the information sharing with the survivors, the participants passively wait for the day they would be released from the shelter homes, sent to their homes and community, and will have a sigh of relief. In the absence of adequate knowledge about trafficking laws and their legal entitlements, the participants were quite fearful of seeking help from the police or the other law enforcement agencies. Fear of prosecution compelled them to deliberately and silently bear the traumatic aftermath of rescue due to ignorance about their rights to be protected. To conclude, the lack of information sharing has been found to affect the process of rescue, and rehabilitation adversely.

4.3 Identification of the minors and age determination during the rescue

The testimonies of the participants highlight another significant impediment to the removal of the minor survivors and their rehabilitation and reintegration. It is found that most of these survivors did not possess any identifying documents which made it hard to determine their age or whereabouts. The findings reveal that the determination of the age of the survivors during a raid and rescue is quite problematic for both the trafficked survivors as well as the law enforcement machinery. The participant reported that during the rescue operations, the survivors were paraded in full public view for their physical age verification. The results of the study reveal that the police and other law enforcement officials were interested in rescuing the minors during these raids due to the legal obligations leaving the other adult females. Hence, discrimination of the minors from the adults posed significant challenges during the raids.

The narratives of the participants further reveal that the brothel owners were quite aware of the legal implications of procuring a child for prostitution in a brothel. Hence, the brothel owners ensured that the participants reported themselves to be above 18 years of age during these raids to avoid legal repercussions. The findings further reveal that during the raids and rescue, the brothel owners hide the child survivors so that they could not be located and rescued by the police. For example, one of the participants narrated how the brothel owner hid her before the raid, but she deliberately came out in front of the rescue team and thus was able to win her freedom. Ayesha recalled:

“I did not like the place (the brothel). I always looked forward to the opportunity to run away from there (the brothel). But I was afraid of being caught. The owner hid me before the raid, but no sooner than I saw the police, I came out by myself. I was afraid, but I kept reiterating to Allah to help me return to my home as soon as possible.”

The process of physical identification has been found to be dubious as it is often difficult to distinguish a girl in her early teens (13-14 years old) from many eighteen years old which makes the rescue process difficult for the law enforcement. This dubious age criterion has had negative implications for the rescue provisions as only the handful of survivors was rescued and removed from the brothels during the raid leaving the infinite pool of females in the vicious cycle of abuse and exploitation. Many of the participants revealed that they were threatened by the brothel owners to not to disclose their real age to the police during the raids at any cost else they have face consequences. Consequently, during the rescue, most of the survivors reported themselves as major i.e. above eighteen years old to the police due to the fear of prosecution. Mala aged 17 years reported:

“I gave my age as 24 in front of the police as the didi instructed me to do so. All the other girls inflated their ages, so I also did the same.”

The narratives of the participants suggested that the rescue team was only concerned with the under eighteen children in the brothels while the adult females in the brothels were booked for solicitation under anti-solicitation laws. It is further found that the age estimation of the rescued children is mandatory under Section 15 (5A) of the ITPPA. The future of the survivors depends upon the outcome of the age determination test. If the age determination tests yield the age of the survivor as under eighteen years of age, then she is sent to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for further care and assistance. The CWCs are government statutory bodies for the care and protection of the children. Their primary responsibility includes but is not limited to the disposal of cases for the care, protection, treatment, development, and rehabilitation of the children in trafficking and their reintegration into the homes and communities. The CWCs are also responsible for pursuing the trial against the brothel owners for trafficking meanwhile delivering the best care in the interests of the survivors of trafficking (Child Welfare Committees in India: A comprehensive analysis aimed at strengthening the Juvenile Justice System for children in need of care and protection, 2013).

The findings of the study further revealed that the future of the survivors upon rescue depends on the outcomes of the age determinant techniques. Currently, the most commonly used methods of age determination are Bone Ossification Test (BOT), which yields two values within which the age lies. In general praxis, the lower value is accepted as the age for legal purposes. Depending on the age of the survivor, the survivors were subsequently admitted to a residential care center for further rehabilitation and reintegration. Nevertheless, the findings of the BOT gave rise to other complications. At the time of the data collection, in Delhi, the BOT was not available at all hospitals. Consequently, the BOT results were often delayed resulting in delayed proceedings to follow. In many cases, it was found that lab reports were available only after a month or longer, as there was no time stipulation for submitting the results of the age determination test to the investigating agency/court. Consequently, the survivors were forced to outlive at the shelter homes for undue reasons. Many of the participants were unhappy with this delay in the BOT reports. One of the participants complained:

“Neither the bone test report comes, nor they let us go home.”

Hence, it is evident that the determination of the age during the raids and rescue posed additional challenges to the rescue and rehabilitation intervention for the survivors of trafficking.

4.4 Life at the shelter home

Post rescue the survivors were placed at the shelter home for further recovery and rehabilitation before their return and reintegration into their home and communities. Describing their current lives at the shelter homes, one of the participants replied:

“I get up in the morning, take my bath then help in the kitchen during lunch and dinner...in the afternoon chat with my friends or take a nap, attend classes afterward...learn whatever the teachers teach...then go to bed at night.”

Some of the participants were quite happy and grateful for being able to escape the exploitative and abusive life inside the brothels. They abhorred their past inside the brothels and eagerly looked forward to returning to their homes and communities. They actively participated in the shelter activities learning whatever skills were taught to them. Many of the participants did not attend a school or were dropouts before being trafficked. One of the participants who had no formal schooling prior to being trafficked was glad to have learned to read and write at the shelter home. She was quite elated to be able to read and write and had realized the importance of education. She was determined to educate her daughter when she grows up in the future. She positively asserted:

“I would now educate my daughter so that she grows up into a lawyer in future and help prosecute bad people [here in this context, the bad people mean people who traffic girls into prostitution.]”

Regarding the vocational skills provided at the shelter home, few participants were satisfied with the vocational skills provided and believed that these skill training mitigated their trauma and bolstered their lost confidence. Najnin optimistically proclaimed:

“I have learned beautician courses here and want to open my own parlor once I go out.”

However, some of the participants were dissatisfied with the limited vocational options and believed that the vocational courses should be market-oriented such as a course in the computer could have been a better option from the job perspective.

Many of the survivors suffered from severe mental, and emotional outcomes of trafficking such as anger, anxiety, depression, trauma, and so on. Emotional outbursts were common among the survivors. One of the participants confessed to suffering from severe episodes of restlessness and sleepless nights at the shelter home. She added:

“I don't like being here. I get annoyed often. I feel like strangulating myself.”

Another participant added:

“They have confined me here; I feel suffocated here. One night I broke glass from the window pane and hit myself in my wrist.”

The other survivors also admitted experiencing several emotional and mental outcomes of trafficking highlighting the need for extended psychological counselling and support for the survivors of trafficked post-rescue.

Some of the participants felt homesick and were longing for the loving and caring atmosphere of their families. Nonetheless, many of them developed friendships with their peers at the

shelter homes which bolstered their trauma and lost self-confidence. They enjoyed the company of these friends living together and sharing their feelings of joy and sorrow with them. Rita aged 14 years replied:

“I have made three friends here, we eat, sleep, and play together.”

However, some of the participants were unhappy with the provisions at the shelter homes and frequently complained that their movements were guarded, including their contact with their families. The participants viewed this as imprisonment and expressed their displeasure with the confined shelter arrangements. Although these restrictions were meant for the protection of the participants, however, the participants perceived these as negative. Some of the participants were distressed due to these restraints and abhorred the restrictions on their movements. One of the participants replied:

“We are not allowed to go out, it seems like a prison.”

Some of the participants detested the disciplinary regime and found it hard to stick to the timelines and schedules. The narratives exhibit that some of the participants had a tough time adjusting to the shelter routines. One of the participants reported that in the brothels she was forced to work in the nights which had disturbed her sleep cycle and thus she had considerable difficulty in adhering to the prescribed timetable at the shelter. She recalled initially she was unable to sleep at nights inside the shelter home and thus failed to abide by the stipulated time table where they were expected to get up in the morning and go to bed at night at the shelter home. She replied:

“The time does not quickly get over in the night, and upon getting late, we are scolded in the mornings.”

Many of the participants expressed disinterest in the activities pursued at the shelter. One of the participants was quite unhappy at the shelter as reflected in her testimony below:

“I do not like this place. Girls keep on fighting amongst themselves.”

Some of the participants also narrated incidents of discrimination and prejudice from the shelter staff. The participants reported that few of the shelter staff were rough and rude. Some of the participants detested the insensitive approach of the staff and restrained from sharing their intimate feelings with them. Sometimes few of the shelter staff often resorted to name-calling which thwarted the participants’ trust in the rehabilitation measures.

Further, many of them complained of corrupt practices in the shelter homes such as the quality of the food served or inadequate provisions for their livings. Many participants complained that often the quantity of the food fell short of the requisite amount for the shelter inmates especially on occasions of special lunches/dinners. Some of the participants were dissatisfied with the food supplied at the shelter home and made dissenting remarks as listed below. One of the participants complained:

“I don’t like the food served here.”

Another one added:

“Tea is as bad as somebody has washed his/her hands in water.”

Yet another participant complained:

“They do not give us porridge [local Indian cuisine].”

Some of the participants were unhappy with the restrictions on the unavailability of cosmetics in the shelter homes. Few participants were quite displeased with the uniform system in the shelter. They longed to wear colourful dresses. The survivors expressed their discontent with the provisions available in many ways. Some of the participants deliberately skipped the vocational classes or counselling regime to express their displeasure with rehabilitation assistance. Few of them also indulged in anti-social behaviours such as the use of slangs, or hostile behaviour with the peers or the staff, or even self-inflicting behaviour in the worst cases.

To conclude, the survivors professed different levels of satisfaction with the rescue and rehabilitation provisions. Few of them were discontent with the assistance available for the survivors of trafficking and frequently complained about the inadequacies in the shelter home. The testimonies of the participants reflect that many of them perceived the shelter home as the second incarceration after the brothels due to their restricted mobilities in the shelter home.

5 Discussion

The results of the study reveal that the age-old methods of raid and rescue for the protection of the survivors of trafficking have neither worked nor been effective, besides being violative from a rights perspective (Sen & Nair, 2004). The results of the study further revealed that the behaviour of the police during the rescue as well as at police stations is often offensive and insulting (Chaulagai, 2009; Locke, 2010; Sircar & Dutta, 2011). Consequently, the process of rescue is often traumatizing, confusing, and rather violent for the survivors. In the absence of the information sharing with the survivors, the survivors found it difficult to trust the law enforcement during the rescue operations as law enforcement and even service providers can be perceived as another trafficker-like person by the survivors of the trafficking (Preble & Black, 2019; Srikantiah, 2007). Bandhyopadhyay et al. (2009) found that these "rescuers" never care to know the problems and feelings of the participants and violate their rights by evicting them from their workplaces. The narratives of the survivors suggested that the survivors were ill-treated during the rescue operations which made them sceptical of the entire rescue and rehabilitation programs. The data further highlight that this top-down approach of raid and rescue is not been found to be effective in practice as simply removing someone from a trafficking situation and placing them in a shelter with social services does not automatically restore the survivor's sense of autonomy, agency, or empowerment (Preble & Black, 2019).

The results of the study further revealed that most of the participants did not trust the police and were hesitant to approach them for assistance. The participants reported that they found the entire hurried raid mechanism as chaotic and felt threatened. Although it is a criminal offense to run a brothel in India, yet in practice survivors of trafficking are implicated more than the brothel keepers and pimps (Djuranovic, 2009; Shivdas, 2008). Hence, the police raids created a stressful and chaotic situation in which participants did not felt secure enough to share information with the police or law enforcement (Brennan, 2005; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012). It is further found that due to the hurried rescue operations, the participants were unable to bring their belongings such as money, clothes, etc. from the brothels. Many of the participants confessed to reporting the wrong age to law enforcement to avoid the raids and rescue operations. It is not unusual for the survivors to lie about their age during the raids,

often on the instruction of the traffickers jeopardizing the entire rescue and rehabilitative efforts (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003).

Lack of information sharing has been found to be disruptive for the rescue and rehabilitation mechanism. Additionally, the survivors felt betrayed as the promise of speedy repatriation to their families and communities was not followed which added to their frustration and agony. The fact that a sizeable chunk of the participants was not even aware of the purpose for which they had been lodged in the shelter homes, despite having stayed there for a considerable period of time, speaks volumes about the significance of information sharing with the participants. Moreover, the shelter homes were established with the intent to provide temporary shelter to the survivors' post-rescue waiting to return for reintegration in their homes/ communities. Therefore, an unusually long stay in these homes due to bone age tests or other contingencies highlights the deficiencies and loopholes in the existing system. This suggests that the law enforcement and social service interventions should be mindful of their approach during outreach and exit interventions to address the inherent mistrust between the survivors and the service providers (Preble & Black, 2019).

The participants professed different levels of satisfaction with the rescue and rehabilitation assistance available inside the shelter. The shelter ran vocational skill training programs such as parlour work, mobile repairing, and tailoring for economic rehabilitation for the survivors. Economic rehabilitation is pivotal in bolstering the self-confidence of the survivors making them self-sufficient to provide for themselves and their families once out of the shelter homes. However, few of the participants were unhappy with the limited skill training options as their interests were different. The vocational skill training must be based on a realistic analysis of the job market and should take into account both the interests of the individual as well as the regional job market (US Agency for International Development, 2007).

The findings further reveal that the participants suffered from the emotional and mental outcomes of trafficking and psychosocial support and counselling at the shelter helped them cope with the anxiety and depression brought on by their traumatic experiences and helped in rebuilding their self-esteem and self-confidence. Few participants were happy being rescued, a handful of participants felt that their movements were restricted and therefore did not feel at ease in the shelter.

The responses of the participants further highlighted a range of malpractices in the shelter homes such as inadequate infrastructure facilities, shortage of funds, poorly or untrained staff and personnel, insufficient provisions for psychological care, and limited skill training amenities, corruption, and so on. It has been found that most of the participants have been staying in the shelter home for months or even years and their movements and contacts with their family were severely restrained. Several participants viewed the house as the second incarceration, some of whom perceived this as worse than the brothels. In the name of home verification or age determination, the participants were detained in the shelter home for unusually long periods. Use of slangs or abusive language borne because of brothel experience was ridiculed at the shelter inciting ill-treatment or ridicule from the shelter staff, which stood in sharp contrast to the extent rehabilitation approach which views children in ST as innocent and naive with the objective of restoring their 'childhood' through rescue and rehabilitation (Hoque, 2010).

The findings of the present study further highlight that the entire rescue and rehabilitation framework perceived the survivors as passive and docile, untenable of an individual agent

who must be protected by the law enforcement agencies. The participants were thus expected to be a silent recipient, standing on the receiving end of all rehabilitation assistance. In the absence of proper information sharing, the survivors failed to understand and appreciate the objectives of their rescue and transfer to the shelter home. They perceived their lives being controlled by the staff, their movements, and behaviour being watched, and their contacts with the outside world being curtailed and monitored (Sen & Nair, 2004).

The current anti-trafficking framework in the country treats survivors of trafficking as passive and helpless marginal subjects requiring reintegration into mainstream society (Harrington, 2005 cited in Brunovskis & Surtees, 2008). The participants were expected to be a silent recipient, standing on the receiving end of all rehabilitation assistance. This dubious approach significantly disrupts all rehabilitative efforts including their rescue from the brothels to their stay at the shelter homes, as well as future reintegration. With the lack of information sharing, the participants grew infuriated, and they considered rescue as substituting one system of control for the another.

Further, the core principle of rehabilitation and reintegration is viewed as 'reformation', i.e., correction in the personalities of the participants (Bjerkan et al., 2005). The extant framework of child protection is governed by the 'idealized western notion of childhood.' According to the Western model, childhood is viewed as a time of dependency and innocence; the period during which children ought to be socialized by adults to become competent social actors in the future (Godziak, 2008; Orchard, 2007). Any deviation from the western notion of childhood is considered as a loss of childhood. Ideally, the children are expected to be free from any sexual or physical intimacies with the opposite sex. The entire rehabilitation exercise is designed in a way that the participants blossom into a 'child' again as a product of these rehabilitation efforts. However, in practice, many of these participants did not fit the stereotyped image of naive and innocent children and thus failed to conform to the norms of 'childhood' as envisaged by the policymakers. On the contrary, many of the 16-17-year-olds in this study considered themselves adults, not children, and had considerable difficulties in adjusting to programs, which wanted to assist them in "reclaiming their lost childhood". The children's reluctance to see themselves as victims stood in sharp contrast to the perceptions of the service providers who resorted to name-calling and abusive behaviour towards the survivors.

The findings of this study must be read in light of the following limitations. The social desirability effect might have influenced the interviewee's responses. While the interviewer utilized many strategies to minimize this, the sensitive nature of the subject of trafficking is susceptible and therefore subject to self-censorship on the part of the participants. Finally, as with all qualitative research, the findings are not generalizable beyond the participants interviewed. However, the objective of this study was not to gain generalizable results but to acquire detailed accounts of the rescue mechanism and daily life in the shelter home post-rescue for the participants selected.

6 Implications of the study

Trafficking of children for the sex trade is a huge problem in India influencing millions of girls every year. However, research on rescue and rehabilitation measures for the survivors of trafficking is in the nascent stage in the Indian context. Hence, the findings of this study have significant implications for the policymaking, as well as research and development vis-à-vis the rescue and the rehabilitation provisions. The findings of the study highlight the flawed intervention measures for the protection of survivors of trafficking. It is found that the

survivors are usually removed from the brothels forcibly through the raids. However, these raids are chaotic for the survivors due to the lack of ignorance about the raids and their rights and prerogative as the survivors of sex trafficking and the fear of law enforcement.

The lack of information sharing has been found to be another major impediment in the successful rescue and rehabilitation of the survivors of trafficking. It is found that the survivors had little knowledge about the laws and legislation or the purpose and provisions of these raids. The police and other stakeholders do not invest much time and resources on communicating these issues with the survivors' post-rescue which makes them apprehensive of the rescue mechanism. This lack of information sharing is detrimental to the rescue and rehabilitation process, as the survivors turn hostile to the police and the anti-trafficking interventions designed to protect them from the vicious cycle of trafficking.

The testimonies of the survivors further reveal a lack of empathy among the police and other personnel responsible for anti-trafficking interventions. Thus, an effective intervention could be sensitization training for the police and other stakeholders before participating in the raids. The sensitization training manual must include content on methods of carrying raids, language and behaviour guidelines for treating the child victims, and so on. The survivors in this research were quite sceptical of these raids emphasizing the value of sensitive treatment by the police and law enforcement.

Besides, the determination of the age of the survivors during the rescue and post-rescue has also been found to be problematic in this study. Most of the survivors did not have a birth certificate or adequate identifying documents for proof of date of birth and hence, the bone ossification test was employed to determine their age for legal provisions. The registration of births and death act 1969 has been in practice for decades but this provision was not enforced properly. Hence, the registration of births is not common in the rural areas which are the principal source areas of trafficking in India. Most of the children from these areas never enter into the Census register of the country and hence, remain deprived of their rights and entitlements throughout their life. The findings of the study reveal the dire need for the creation of the national portal for a birth where all individuals born should have a unique identification number so that tracking them in case of mishap is easier. The universalization of the Aadhaar scheme has been an improvement in this regard however, the enrolment in Aadhaar is still not cent percent in India. The availability of standard identification documents for age and other vital statistics would expedite the legal proceedings.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the extant rehabilitation assistance for the survivors of trafficking. The results highlight the dire state of the rehabilitation provisions for the survivors of trafficking in the country. The purpose of these rehabilitation measures is the restoration of the previous self, focusing on their physical, mental, and vocational recovery. The current provisions for the survivors of the trafficking overemphasize on counselling and therapeutic intervention with a minor focus on skill training. The findings of the study highlight the critical role of the vocational support for the survivors of trafficking and the prevention of re-trafficking. Hence, vocational skill training should occupy the central focus of the assistance provisions unlike the current skill training amenities of the traditional skill of stitching, and knitting. The rehabilitation program should comprise of realistic analysis of the local market with sufficient support for credit facilities post-rescue. The local governmental and non-governmental organizations could be instrumental in this regard who can provide support to the rehabilitated individual in attaining self-dependence which in turn will help check the re-trafficking of the survivors.

The findings further reveal that the raids only help a handful of the survivors and are not effective in the prevention of trafficking in the first instance. Hence, the government must direct more resources and attention towards the prevention of trafficking rather than on damaging control post-trafficking. The best intervention measure could be promoting community-based awareness programs on what is trafficking, popular modus operandi of the traffickers, and the relevant laws and legislation for the protection of the victims of trafficking using suitable Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) material. The results highlight the dire need for amendments in the extant anti-trafficking perspective. The current rehabilitation exercise is patriarchal in nature as the services and the provisions are assigned by the law enforcement without invoking the choices and interests of the beneficiaries. The extant framework guiding the rehabilitation programs must give away to the participatory approach where the focus is on the empowerment of the participants. The participatory approach could help liberate survivors from the 'victimhood' and helping them emerge independently because of the rehabilitation program. The survivors must be encouraged to voice their concerns for the capacity building rather than being at the receiving end of the welfare measures. The participatory approach would facilitate the participants in overcoming their traumatic experiences easily as well as liberate them from the notion of the 'victimhood' for the rest of their lives.

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