The causes of human trafficking of international migrants: Evidence from Sri Lanka

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Abstract: *This paper analyses the causes contributing to the growth of human trafficking in Sri Lanka. The study is based on primary data collected in 2016 from persons who logged complaints on trafficking at the Repatriation section of the Ministry of Foreign Employment, Sri Lanka by applying purposive sampling method and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. Causes of trafficking is connected to all three stages of trafficking – recruitment, transportation and exploitation at destination. The results revealed that causes for human trafficking are complex and interrelated. Economic hardship, unemployment, domestic violence, restrictive migration laws, lack of knowledge regarding dangers of trafficking and insufficient penalties against traffickers are the main causes for the expansion of trafficking in the country. The study suggests that policy processes should strengthen migration laws, especially in relation to illegal migration, monitor the conditions of international labour migrants at destinations and create job opportunities in Sri Lanka so that the vulnerability for trafficking would be reduced.*

Key words: international labour migration, causes, human trafficking

Introduction

Human trafficking is a current global problem that is spread across every continent and most countries. It is also complex, and is done through both legal and illegal migration (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 2015). The Council of Europe's 'Convention on action against trafficking in human beings' defines trafficking as follows. "*Trafficking in human beings shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of 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*" (United Nations, 2000). It is a process that denies people virtually all human rights, integrity and safety. In this process, the right to freedom is destroyed through torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Further, the rights to freedom of movements and the rights to connect with family are also destroyed. Trafficking is therefore equated to a form of modern day slavery (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014).

Every year approximately 900,000 persons, originating from different countries are trafficked around the world; they are trafficked to, and in, several others. Between 2010 and 2012, trafficked persons having citizenship in 152 countries were identified in 124 countries of the world. This indicates the spread and the gravity of the issue. As trafficking is an issue faced by many countries, the '*Trafficking in Persons Reports of the US Department of State, 2005*' divided the world's countries into three tiers[1] based on actions taken by governments to reduce the trafficking issue (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014). According to this classification, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Micronesian, Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, China, Bangladesh, India, and Maldives are categorized as Tier 2 countries or those where the governments do not fully comply with the trafficking Act, but are making significant efforts to do so. Sri Lanka is placed as a-Tier 2 country for the third consecutive year by the US Department of State (2010), which notes that human trafficking is highly rampant in the country.

Incidence of human trafficking is high in South Asian countries. This is mainly because many of these countries engage in trafficking due to their geographical proximity and open borders with other regions. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014) Sri Lanka is the main hub for human trafficking in the South Asian region at present. Further, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and various parts of India are identified as major trafficking routes.

In the above countries more women, compared to men are trafficked because there is a significant female labour migration flow, especially from Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Maldives to the Gulf States, and women are trafficked to, and in, the Gulf States

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[1] **TIER 1**: countries whose government fully comply with the Act's minimum standards.

TIER 2: countries whose government do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those stands,

> (a). The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or

> (b). There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or

> (c). the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

TIER 3: countries whose government do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

(International Labour Organization, 2004). Siddhisena and Ranasinghe (2016) also state that labour migration is a major cause that leads to trafficking in Sri Lanka and shows that women in Sri Lanka are trafficked in the Gulf State. Further, women and men who migrate willingly to Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, The UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Singapore to work as construction workers, domestic servants or garment factory workers become trafficked in several forms, such as through exploitation of labour, violation of human rights and fundamental freedom, forced labour, violence and discrimination against women, sexual exploitation and forcing people into prostitution (Amirthalingam, 2013; Siddhisena & Ranasinghe, 2016).

Many Sri Lankans migrate for foreign employment after registering at the SLBFE[2]. The Sri Lankan government has the responsibility and is legally bound to protect the labour migrants who register at the SLBFE. Many migrants who have registered with the SLBFE achieve their goals in connection to migration. However, some face exploitation at the hands of traffickers. The SLBFE notes that migrants should completed three conditions to migrate: (i) females should not have children less than 5 years; (ii) migrants should complete required age for migration, and; (iii) they should have approved medicals. Migrants who cannot fulfill these mandatory conditions sort to illegal methods such as migrating through unauthorized agencies. The Sri Lankan government takes measures to regulate migration. However, its purview covers only legal migration, and therefore trafficking, embedded in illegal migration continues in high magnitude.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to examine the factors related to the growth of human trafficking in Sri Lanka. To fulfill this objective, the study focuses on social, economic and policy factors that contribute to trafficking in the country.

Theoretical Perspective

In order to analyze the social, economic and policy related causes of human trafficking at macro and micro levels Lee's push-pull theory (Lee, 1966), neo-classical economic theory (Lewis, 1954; Ranis & Fei, 1961; Harris & Todaro, 1971), new economics migration theory (Tatlor, 1986), dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979) and world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974; Petras, 1981; Castelles, 1989; Sassen, 1988, Morawska, 1990) can be used.

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[2] Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment.

Neo-classical theory focuses on the impact of migration on the migrant at individual level and discusses at micro level that wage inequality in a country causes international migration when opportunity prevails to earn a better income at destination. Accordingly decision on migration is taken on estimating the cost and benefit of migration; if the cost of migration is low - higher probability to migrate. As shown below, a method adopted by traffickers is providing loans to potential migrants so that cost of migration decreases, thus encouraging migration. This theory further explains that if an individual's human capital benefits (i.e. level of education, training, experiences and language competency) are at a higher level, and there are adequate opportunities to improve them at the destination, there is a higher possibility for migration and obtaining employment. However, majority who get caught to traffickers are the low educated and those employed in the informal sector. This increases chances of being unemployed and exploited.

New economics of migration model explains that migration depends on decisions of the household and not the individual, and if there is a possibility to increase the expected income through migration, less attention would be given to migration risks. Here migration is a means to create household economic autonomy. Many of those trafficked encounter household economic difficulties; consequently societal/family pressure to migrate is high, and risk of migration evades attention.

Dual economic theory of analyzing the labour market of the industrialized countries and international migration can also be used to explain trafficking. This theory elucidate that migration occurs due to demand for labour. When industrial countries do not have sufficient labour this void is filled by labour from developing countries. Industrialization process creates two types of employment: a) employment with high social status and; b) employment with low social status. Natives of industrial countries refrain from engaging in low social status employment and this labour demand is fulfilled from developing countries. The unemployed and low wage earners readily supply to this demand, unknowing the repercussions.

This study focus on social, economic and policy causes related to trafficking from Sri Lanka. With the open economic policy introduced in 1970s, labour migration became one of the country's main income sources. Sri Lankan labour was mainly directed to the Middle East. However, this has caused different types of physical and mental abuses for the migrants. World system theory explains that the world is divided as capitalist and non-capitalist and migration takes place as a result of the expansion of international global market. Industries and entrepreneurs from developed countries migrate to developing countries to utilize the

According to Lee's theory (1966) four factors should be considered for migration - push factors at origin, pull factors at destination, intervening obstacles and migrant characteristics.

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These push and pull factors could influence separately or in combination. In 2006, the ILO identified demand and supply factors for trafficking. Accordingly push factors at the origin are poverty, unemployment, family dissolution, gender inequality, lack of access to information, cultural and societal norms towards gender violence, rules and regulations and natural and man-made disasters.

Examples for intervening obstacles are visa regulations, natural disasters, physical obstacles and financial difficulties. In trafficking, visa regulations could be an intervening obstacle. Traffickers overcome this through illegal migration. During recruitment, middle men provide loans to migrants. Though individual financial difficulties conquered by this, it becomes a basis for exploitation at the destination.

Lee also explains that individual attitudes, family structure and characteristics, IQ level of migrant, experiences in life, age, physical characteristics and the relationship with the family is important in the process of migration. The trafficked as will be seen below has many common characteristics that lead to being trafficked.

Literature Review

Perry and Ewing (2013) show that poverty, gender, lack of policy and limitations with regard to enforcement, age, migration, displacement and conflict, ethnicity, culture, ignorance of trafficking methods, and caste are key social determinants that facilitate trafficking. Conversely, determinants that mitigate trafficking include formal education, citizenship, maternal education, higher caste status and birth order. They also identified determinants for trafficking of women and children in Southeast Asia. Both male and female children are vulnerable to trafficking, but impact can differ by age – i.e. pre-pubescent males are more likely to be trafficked while post-pubescent females are more vulnerable to trafficking. They show that extent of vulnerability varies by gender and age. For example, fear of HIV/AIDs drives demand for younger girls. Kapstein (2006) reveals that approximately 80 percent of today's slaves on the global market are female, and up to 50 percent are under age 18. According to the UN (2000) these victims span the globe, being trafficked from 127 countries to be exploited in 137 countries. The slave trade is also a major problem in Africa where children are often forced to serve as soldiers-but relatively little is known about trafficking in this region. Siddisena and Ranasinghe (2016) also state that both international and internal trafficked women are not of homogenous characteristics.

Perry and Ewing (2013) show that marital status is a defining characteristic - most victims are single, and marriage is considered a recruitment tool. Girls who marry young, elope, or are married to strangers because their parents cannot afford a dowry are at high risk. Widows,

divorced, and abandoned women are also vulnerable. Furthermore they show that 'virginity' is a high demand factor for trafficking; virgins are in demand due to various cultural beliefs and fear of AIDS. The sale of a virgin (by traffickers or family) is very profitable. In contrast, some studies analyzed by Perry and Ewing show that rape victims are also vulnerable.

Trafficking is done through legal migration as well as illegal migration. Therefore when considering social factors it is important to pay attention to both. Afolayan (2001) shows that in developing countries population growth, socio-cultural issues, ecological disasters, social networking, government migration policies and regional economic integration have resulted in illegal migration.

Perry and Ewing (2013) show that ethnicity is a characteristic connected to trafficking. Ethnicity related factors such as marginalization, lack of rights and/or citizenship status, and proximity to borders make trafficking easier and more socially acceptable among ethnic minorities. However they also say that, some studies note that ethnicity has no impact. "Caste" is also important when discussing social characteristics. Research has shown that victims are often from lower (occupational or sex worker) castes. Daughter-selling is common because low caste communities cannot find work. After several years of service as concubines to priests, girls from religious castes are sold. In contrast, some studies note that women from higher castes are increasingly becoming vulnerable to trafficking.

According to Perry and Ewing various regional cultures place a lower value on women in families, society, and policy. These culturally induced biases increase vulnerability among females. Factors such as water access, emotional fragility, gang participation, and inclination for risk-taking were noted to increase vulnerability to trafficking. Chuang (2006) explains that gender discrimination underlying migratory flows is maintained through a collusion of factors at the market, state, community, and family levels. Also women's lack of rights and freedoms is further exacerbated by certain (macro-level) globalizing trends that have produced an environment conducive to trafficking.

Perry and Ewing (2013) state that illiteracy and low levels of education are common characteristics of trafficked victims. Especially maternal education is associated with decreased vulnerability to trafficking. Also Perry and Ewing (2013) underline that domestic violence irrespective of economic status, education or ethnicity of the victim is a major factor for trafficking because women/children looking to be rescued are driven to trust traffickers.

Chuang (2006) revealed that structural adjustment policies add to the pressure on women to migrate in search of work. These policies, which require governments to reduce expenditures on social services, cause women to take on additional income earning activities in order to

maintain families. This often pushes women to work in the unregulated, informal sectors, thus contributing to the rise of gendered-labor networks such as prostitution or sex work, domestic work, and low-wage production work.

Jayathilake (2008) notes that natural and man-made disaster creates trafficking. This study gives example from the Sri Lanka tsunami and war, which displaced large numbers of people. Among the internally displaced, women and children are more vulnerable to unscrupulous employers who deceive and cheated in the pretext of providing proper employment. These women end up facing harm, cruelty and misery.

Economic characteristics are especially important in trafficking. Factors such as feminization of poverty are main push factors. However these causes problems such as economic burden and debt bondage to left behind families also (Chuang, 2006). Chuang (2006) reveals, particularly of sex trafficking and says that the victims are usually the poverty-stricken.

Siddhisena and Ranasinghe (2016) talks of the relationship between economic burden at the origin and irregular migration. In this context, it is timely to question whether poverty is the main cause for trafficking, especially for women in Sri Lanka. This research highlights that youth unemployment and unrest could be inducing factors for illegal migration to Italy, US, South Korea and Japan.

Perry and Ewing (2013) mentioned that demand for cheap/free labour is a major pull factor for human traffickers. Demand is largely unchecked by policies, and strengthened by low cultural regard for females. Family dysfunction has been shown as major factor commonly taken advantage of by traffickers to hire women as cheap labour. Chuang (2006) states that the growth in trafficking reflects not just an increase of "push" factors in the globalized economy, but also the strong "pull" of unmet labor demands in the wealthier destination countries.

Research Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary data collected from persons coming to the 'Repatriation Section' of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Sri Lanka to lodge complaints on trafficking (here after Study on trafficking, 2016). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire survey and qualitative data through in-depth interviews. One hundred and fifteen (115) persons who lodged complaints related to trafficking issues at the MEA during the period 05.09.2016 to 21.11.2016 were selected as the study population by using purposive sampling method, and their acceptance to participate in the survey. These 115 were family members of the persons who were trafficked.

The 115 selected for the questionnaire survey were asked if they were willing to participate in a detailed discussion, and 65 agreed. They were selected for the in-depth interviews. Trafficked persons are from several geographical locations in Sri Lanka (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of trafficked by district
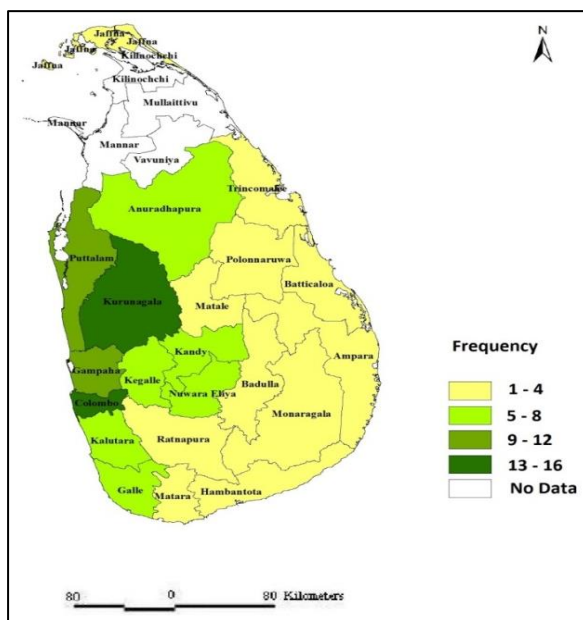
Source: Study on trafficking, 2016

However during the five week period when the study was conducted no respondents from Killinochchi, Mannar, Mullaithivu and Vavuniya districts were identified. Hence only 21 districts out of 25 are covered. At the district level, the highest proportion of trafficked are observed in Kurunegala district (14%) and the second (13%) in Colombo district. The lowest proportions are observed in Trincomalee and Ampara districts (0.9% each).

Secondary data was also used, and they are from the Department of Census and Statistics, Human Trafficking Division of the SLBFE, MEA, and IOM. The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS[3] and the study uses uni-variate and bivariate analyses. Qualitative data[4] was analyzed using content analysis focusing on the main themes that were in the in-depth interview guideline that focused on the objectives of the study.

Results and discussion

As noted at the beginning, trafficking is a complex and broad issue. In the process of trafficking, causes for trafficking are only one sub-component. The study however revealed that the factors related to the causes are also complex by it-self. While these factors can be

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[3] Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.
[4] Pseudonyms will be used for all in-depth interviews.

described and analyzed independently, results also showed a clear interrelatedness among them. The following sub-sections will discuss these in detail under seven main themes:

Stages of trafficking

Literature identifies that trafficking can occur, and is connected to all stages in a trafficking process – recruitment, transportation and exploitation. These also parallel with migration stages – at origin, while travelling and at the destination, respectively. Therefore, when discussing causes of trafficking, it is important to connect to stages. In the present study focuses on international trafficking, and it revealed that persons become victims of trafficking because they want to engage in international migration.

Push - pull factors relating to migration

Causes for international migration can be differentiated as push and pull factors (Lee, 1966). Since trafficking is connected to international migration and all of the trafficked in this study wanted to engage in international migration, push pull factors can be connected to trafficking. People want to engage in international migration due to push and/or pull factors at the origin, which results in becoming trafficked. As a starting point to this discussion, Table 1 presents the reasons as to why the trafficked want to engage in international migration.

Table 1: Reasons for international migration[5]

Reasons	Responses	
	Number	Percentage
Economic hardships in the family	105	91.3
Unemployment	49	42.6
Escape domestic violence	9	7.8
Stimulation from society	40	34.8
Marriage and permanent residency	2	1.7
Total sample	**115**	*

Source: Study on trafficking, 2016

Table 1 shows that both push and pull factors contribute to the migration process, and push factors are more prevalent. While economic hardships, unemployment, domestic violence and

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[5] Multiple Responses among the 115 trafficked.

stimulation from society act as clear push factors, seeking permanent residency can be a push as well as a pull factor. These push and pull factors can also be further differentiated as social and economic (or both), where economic reasons seems to dominate.

Economic factors and trafficking

The highest prevalence among reasons is economic hardship of family and unemployment, both clearly economic and connected to poverty. It is revealed that 91 percent have migrated due to economic hardship of family. Forty two (42%) percent of the trafficked are the main income earners in the families. Case studies of these people divulge different aspects of the economic reasons for migration. In relation to economic hardship, one fact is low wages. Thirty seven percent of those reporting economic hardships have been employed before migration, but all in low level jobs such as housemaids (19%), cleaners (11%), sales men (33%), petty traders (5%), worked aboard earlier (10%), and manual labour jobs (21%).

Although the trafficked were employed before migration, their wages were inadequate to meet needs. The mean value of wages was reported as Rs.19,857/- per month, and mode value was Rs.10,000/- before migration. As the monthly income was not sufficient, they have planned to migrate. The above factor is clear from the cases of **Saumya** and **Hedhiris.**[6]

Saumya, lived in a rural area. She had three children. She worked as a labourer for Rs.600 per week. Due to economic difficulties their elder son stopped schooling. She migrated illegally to Saudi Arabia to work as a housemaid as she was unable to bear the economic difficulties of family. First, she lived in a flat and she became ill as a result of work load. Later, she was hospitalized. After that, a person promised to give her security and better income and takes her from there. But he sold her and earned money.

Hedhiris, is a 54 years old father having two children. Hedhiris and his wife didn't have permanent jobs and worked as labourers. Although both of them worked a full week, their weekly salary was Rs.1600. So they had to borrow money and become indebted to credit lenders. His wife migrated to Kuwait as a housemaid in 2014 to overcome economic difficulties. But she faces to various physical violence at the destination country. Later, she complained to the embassy. She had to spend a very harsh time as a jailor there."

Source: Study on trafficking, 2016 – in-depth interviews

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[6] All names are pseudonyms.

The above revealed that most people migrated due to economic difficulties in their family. But after they migrated, they had to face other difficulties such as labour and sexual exploitation.

Forty three (42.6%) percent of persons migrated as a result of unemployment at the origin. Although their aim was to spend a luxurious life, they had to face a harder situation with regard to employment. It is clear from the study of **Wijesuriya'**s case.

> "I'm a father of three children. My elder son was waiting for a job after passing the A/L examination. There are two other younger sisters and brothers. And they don't have permanent jobs. So my son was seeking for a job desperately for two years. But he couldn't find any job. So he immigrated illegally. I was unable to stop my son as my wife had also died from a cancer. Now my son is forcefully harboured at the destination by his employer."

As majority of migrants were subjected to trafficking due to economic factors, brokers are engaging in the process of trafficking with this hypothesis. It was revealed from the study that brokers pan and give fraudulent promises and financial assistance. In this context, 40 percent of the trafficked did not have to pay fees for migration as it was paid by the traffickers. However, after the money has been paid the traffickers resort to threats and forcible actions to make victims migrate against family wishes by putting forward the issue of debt bondage, well planned and created by the traffickers themselves. This becomes a hugh burden and the victims then take unwise decisions such as eloping with the traffickers. It is clear from the study of **Pavithra**'s case.

> "Although my sister prepared everything to migrate as a housemaid to Dubai, she wasn't ready to go as it was difficult to keep her children alone. But, the agency has blackmailed her telling that Rs. 2 lacks have been spent for this. She told me that they have told her to pay back 5 lacks if she can't go abroad. When I told her to go to the police station she said she couldn't because of the threats of agency persons. She asked me how she can she pay Rs. 5 lacks. After that, she has migrated via emigrating visa in 2013 after coming to Colombo with the traffickers without even informing me."

Accordingly, it can be explained that, the economic problems originating from aggravated poverty and unemployment of migrants are captured and used by brokers/traffickers via debt bond to force victims to migrate (i.e. to be trafficked).

Social reasons and trafficking

Social factors also contribute towards persons wanting to migrate and consequently become trafficked. As shown in Table 1 above, three social causes were noted as reasons for migration – escape domestic violence, stimulation from society, and marriage and wanting permanent residence. The latter two reasons can also be connected to economic factors.

Escape domestic violence

The present study revealed that domestic violence is exclusive for females. In the present study 82 percent among the trafficked are females and 67 percent of them are married. Among these married women, 7.8 percent (9 women) note escaping domestic violence as the main push factor for migration. When women are vulnerable, they sought alternatives without much query or questioning and the traffickers use this socially vulnerable situation to their advantage and the women end up being trafficked.

Nirmala's case reported by her mother is an example.

> "My daughter was married and had four children. Her husband consumes alcohol and fights with her all the time – abuses her and uses filthy words. Due to this she was fed up with everything, even her life. Then a villager informed that she can go abroad for a low cost. She grabbed the opportunity and migrated in 2015 to avoid her problems".

Domestic violence, irrespective of economic status, education or ethnicity has been identified as a significant factor for trafficking by Perry and Ewing (2013) because women looking to be rescued are driven to trust traffickers.

Stimulation from society

The study revealed that the trafficked are actually those who want to migrate, for economic and social factors and unknowingly get trafficked. Thirty five percent have migrated due to stimulation from society. In this case an important role is played by the persons who provide information about migration. Figure 1 shows that the highest proportion of trafficked are from Kurunegala. In-depth interviews indicate the reason for high prevalence of trafficking from the Kurunegala district as there being many agencies distributed in Kurunegala and they act as stimulants for migration.

Informants who are concerned about the wellbeing of the potential migrants will provide genuine information. But those wanting to traffic people will not. Therefore, informants are a

related cause for trafficking. In this study trafficked got information from five sources (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of information sources for migration
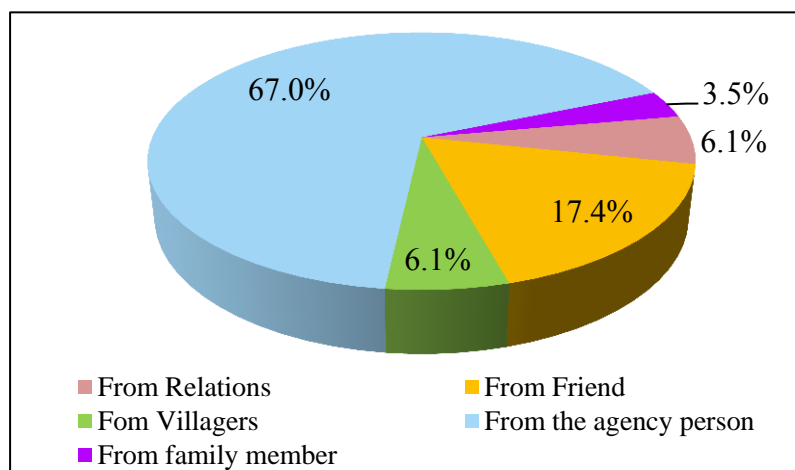
Source: Study on trafficking, 2016

The highest percentage (67%) in the sample had got information about migration from agency personnel and they became trafficked later. These people are motivated by the agency persons to migrate so that they can be trafficked. Persons who suffer from economic hardships, unemployment and domestic violence become prey to traffickers easily and they are motivated by the traffickers to migrate after which they are trafficked. It is the agencies that make it possible for people to migrate illegally at low cost.

People are trafficked by several people. The present study identifies recruiters that are unknown to the trafficked initially such as agency persons as well as known persons such as family members and friends. Based on who recruits, the context of recruitment, methods of migration and its social consequences can differ. Below is a discussion of different issues related to social factors of trafficking using different examples.

Example 1 (Nayanajith, age 35)

The following example provide evidence of a daughter who was trafficked by her mother. Although the social relationship between mothers and children is the strongest of all, certain social circumstances can dismantle even this and lead to trafficking.

> "My wife was brought to Italy by her mother in 2014 for six months. Since then two years and eight months have gone. She migrated through family R visa[7] by divorcing me and marrying another. My wife called and said that her mother sells her to men and does not let her come back. We stayed at her parents' home before migration. But her mother chased us after my wife migrated as I wanted my wife back. I have two children, aged nine and seventeen. Elder one is doing OL exam. My children are mentally affected without the mother"

Example 1 mainly show three points related to social issues. First that even very close people such as a mother can be a trafficker; Second, that social relationships can break at the recruitment stages when trafficking is identified and questioned; Third, that trafficking can create social, psychological and other issues for the trafficked as well as others. Although the trafficked woman's husband is still acting as her husband he is legally not married to her. The need to migrate made them divorce and he (or she) has no legal right to the other, which makes issues more complex.

Example 2 (Piyathissa, age 29)

The present study revealed that pressure initiated by brokers affects the decision to migrate. Among people who got information to travel from an agency, 60 percent got the money for migration also through them putting them at risk as seen by the case below.

> "My wife migrated without my approval. We have two children age 6 and 3. We had economic difficulties and an agency person gave 2 lacks to her. This was a great help to us and she thought he was a good person. After we got the money my wife realized that I can't manage without her because we have little children. We told the agency person and said that we will repay the money. But he said he already spent 4 lacks to make arrangements. He started threatening my wife saying she should go and finally my wife went abroad."

This example shows that unknown persons can be traffickers and how they first give material and financial incentives to build relationships and later the same relationship creates the foundation to be trafficked. Apart from this, the example also shows how relationships can be damaged at the recruitment stage due to the way traffickers operate – i.e. the husband says that his wife went without his approval. This is because the pressure from traffickers to go is more than that from the family to stay.

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[7] Through family R visa system migrants have the opportunity to bring their family members to the destination country

Example 3 (Gamini, age 39)

Not only unknown but also own village people can cheat persons impacted by economic difficulties capitalizing on them. **Gamini** provides an example.

> "Pahan is from a nearby village. At that time we had many economic hardships. Pahan knew this. Pahan said his sister living in Dubai for 20 years is paralyzed and she wants a kind lady to look after her. Pahan begged from us to send my wife. He said that if we agreed he will help us with money. We agreed to his request as he was a known person and it was to look after a sick person. He said he needed my wife for 2 months. After she migrated my wife called one day and said Pahan cheated her and she works as a housemaid and the employer does not let her return. After that day there is no information about her. "

The example shows how known people use that relationship to traffic people. It also indicates that known people are more likely to do this because they know of the vulnerabilities of the trafficked (i.e. economic hardships) that can be manipulated. It also shows that innocent people are cheated because of trusting others and their good intentions (i.e. want to help the sick).

Example 4 (Rani, age 49)

When discussing social issues, the present study identifies that marriage is used by people to traffic people. Marriage is put as a pull factor for a better life that leads to trafficking (Miller, 2006). In the present study **Rani** says that,

> "When we were suffering from the several economic hardships, a villager brought a marriage proposal for my only daughter. He is a Japanese boy and they married and after they migrated to Japan in 2015. Since it was marriage we did not worry. After one month she called me and says that her husband has sold her to several foreign people and now she lives in a brothel".

The example shows that very legal and valid circumstances are created to traffic people. The travel arrangement is also by legal methods. What is most important is that it makes trafficking invisible in the context of the authorities as well as the trafficked and their families.

Example 5 (Ananda, age 41)

Brokers identify vulnerable social relationships such as domestic violence and extra-marital affairs to traffic people. **Anandha** provides an example.

> "I am a father with three children. I worked in a remote area and wife started another relationship. After I found out we started fighting and wife eloped with that man to Colombo. Then she went to Dubai and her boyfriend supported her travel. However, the boyfriend was a helper of the agency and got money from them. They sent her illegally and now she is suffering there".

The present study revealed how adulteration closely affected trafficking. In one way people migrate because they want to continue with the adulterous relationship. In another way, the adulterous relationship initiate domestic violence and people migrate to escape this. In this sample nine percent got trafficked due to their extra marital relationships. The example also shows how third parties get involved in the trafficking process by starting love affairs. Jayathilaka (2008, p.40) notes of two types of traffickers - primary and secondary. Primary trafficker "form a nebulous group of all those who assist the kingpin in the different activities involved in trafficking such as brothel owners. Secondary traffickers are those who deliver "human cargo to primary traffickers". Often this group includes relatives, friends and acquaintances of the victims, local goons as well as petty criminals.

Marriage and wanting permanent residence

In the present study two people were trafficked under the guise of marriage by foreigners. Kasun is one example. **Kasun** married a Japanese girl and went with her to Japan where he was trafficked. His father reports:

> "Kasun is my only son, he married a Japanese girl and they migrated to Japan in 2012. After two weeks he came back without his wife. His behavior was abnormal. He did not say why. After three days he went to Japan again. Since then my son or his wife has not communicated with us. A friend of my son said that my son's wife had trafficked him and when he escaped and came back the woman threatened to kill him if he does not return Japan. Now his phone is switched off. We don't know whether our son is living or dead".

The study noted that people get married to foreign nationals so as to migrate due to economic hardships and unemployment at origin, not realizing that the foreign partner's intentions are otherwise, and face trafficking issues at the destination. This is a clear example to show the complexity and interrelatedness among causes for trafficking.

Policy factors and trafficking

The study revealed that certain factors related to policy directly indirectly can also cause trafficking. These are discussed below with examples.

A relatively large proportion attempt migration through illegal means. According to the present study, 93 percent among the trafficked, migrated illegally and were consequently trafficked not only at the destination, but also at recruitment stage. People can use legal or illegal methods to migrate. Most people who have become trafficked have used illegal methods which facilitates trafficking. This is because though people want to engage in international migration due to push or pull factors, they cannot do so due to prevailing laws, visa regulations etc. This makes them engage in illegal methods. According to the present study 93 percent migrated illegally. The present study revealed that trafficked adopted four illegal measures to migrate; a) preparing illegal documents because they have children who are under five (43.5%)[8]; b) illegal use of family R (3.4%); c) preparing illegal medical documents (15.7%) and: d) through visit visa (37.4%). Agencies facilitate illegal migration at low cost.

The case of **Vijitha** is an example for policy connected factors and trafficking. Vijitha, has three children and two of them are under five years. She noted that she migrated illegally because of this which ended in being trafficked. It was noted above that although trafficked were employed before migration, their wages were insufficient. Vijitha migrated because she had not permanent job and could not bear the economic difficulties

One main reason for people, especially women to seek to illegal methods is the prevailing law in Sri Lanka which restricts women with children under five years to migrate. In this present study, the majority who migrated illegally (44%) migrated by preparing illegal documents because they have children under five years. Basu (2003) notes that due to the prevailing ban on the mobility of women with young children without addressing their right to work, they attempt to migrate illegally and become trafficked. The present study confirms Basu's views.

Socio-economic characteristics and trafficking

Religion

Another method adopted by people is migrating through **visit visas** and then staying on for employment, the process usually arranged by agencies. However, due to their illegal stay at the destination they become trafficked or arrested. In-depth interviews showed that an easy

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[8] The Sri Lankan law does not allow mothers with children under 5 to migrate

way to obtain visit visas is to use religion. This is revealed by what **Asafa** says regarding her husband, Mohamed.

> "We are Muslims. My husband went abroad in 2015 through a visit visa to worship Mecca. However his main purpose was to work in Saudi Arabia due to economic hardships in the family. This was arranged by a broker. He had to work for low salaries and whatever jobs the broker said. But later, as he did not have permissions to stay in Saudi Arabia, he was arrested by the police. Now he is in "Albaha Jail" in Saudi Arabia. We are going through several economic hardships now".

The case studies revealed how acceptable social characteristics such as religion is used to out migrate, and then stay on at the destination illegally. However, since these are illegal migrants, they don't have permission to stay at the destination and work, and hence get exploited at work and even arrested, which can aggravate their problems. It is difficult to capture these types of illegal methods in policy, and people use these loop holes in policy to out-migrate and then become trafficked.

Literacy of the trafficked

People become vulnerable to trafficking due to their vulnerable social and economic status. In this case the economic perspective was discussed above as people who are poor and unemployed get involved in trafficking. From another perspective, Perry and Ewing (2013) state that illiteracy and low levels of education are common characteristics of trafficked victims. Proving this, the study shows that 75 percent of the trafficked have an education up to grade 8 or below, with 35 percent having primary education or no schooling. Only a very small minority (2%) have GCE Advance Level education (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of the trafficked by level of education
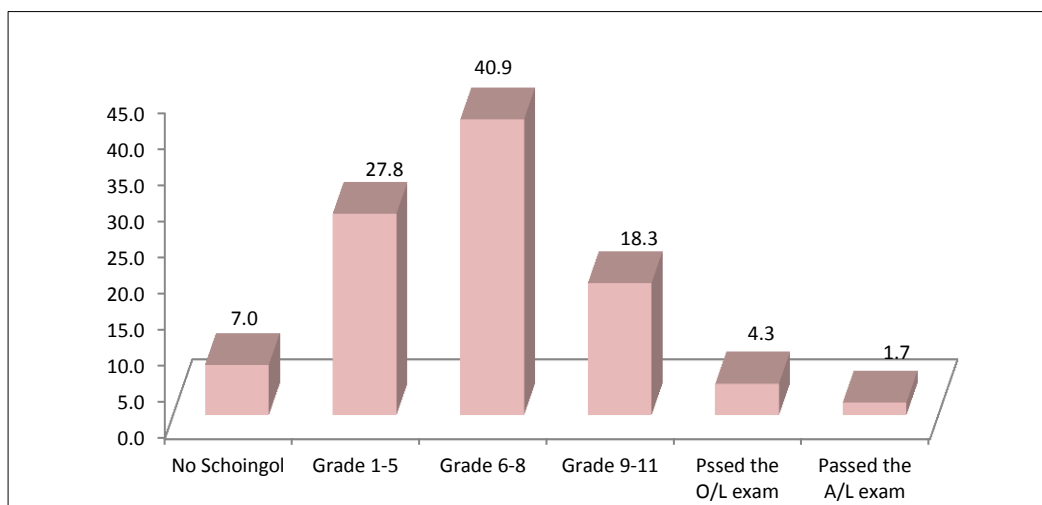
Source: Study on trafficking, 2016

There is a high probability for the low educated to be trafficked, because of related factors such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence. More so it is likely that they can be deceived more easily than the educated. Jayathilaka (2008) in her study notes that 20 percent of trafficked have no schooling and that it makes women an easy prey to 'unscrupulous persons' who use them for their own advantage. Similar situations are revealed in this study as seen from the quote by **Karuna.**

> "Domestic violence and economic hardships was a push factor for my sister to migrate. When the family objected she had second thoughts but the 'agency person' threatened her saying he had already spent 2 lacks for her travel and if she can't go she must pay 6 lacks to them. So she went with him to Colombo. She migrated through a visit visa in 2015, but she did not have a clearly understanding which country she would go to or what job she would do as she has not studied well. For the last 6 months she has not communicated with us".

Karuna's sister has no schooling. Hence she had no idea about the cost of travel arrangements and believed what the Agency person said. She has no schooling. So she couldn't identify what the goal of the agency person was or go against him. Further, Karana's sister had no bargaining power or fall back opportunities due to her low education level. Hettige et al. (2012) says that some labour migrants do not know what their jobs are or what they have to do at the destination due to low education. So they become the most trafficked at destinations.

Though education levels are high in Sri Lanka, disparities still exists. These should be addressed from a policy perspective as they in turn can be detrimental to certain segments in the population.

Conclusion and policy implications

Sri Lanka has experienced challenges of trafficking for a considerable period of time. As already noted, among the South Asian countries Sri Lanka is the main hub for human trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014). Trafficking is not only connected to illegal migration but also legal; it is also a labour issue, involving "supply-demand" dynamics which has expanded this problem further. The root causes of such include

(i) poverty (globalization of poverty, lack of employment opportunities, social and political conflict, social and cultural practices, feminization of migration, lack of information); (ii) demand for labour (low-cost labour and sex service) and; (iii) limiting immigration policies (immigration laws increasingly restrict entry into labour markets of developed countries). According to the present study majority of trafficked were trafficked because of economic difficulties in the family but social and policy related factors also contribute as discussed above.

International labour migration is a popular phenomenon in Sri Lanka, but it creates several socio-economic problems. There is a close relationship between migration and trafficking, but policy formulators have confused the difference between migration and trafficking. It is important to identify the two concepts separately in order to strengthen the regulations to prevent trafficking and to reduce the trends of new illegal migration patterns.

It is visible that most of the trafficked are poverty-ridden and belong to low income families and have low level of education. It is necessary to take more intense measures to eradicate poverty and create job opportunities. Female labour migration is high in Sri Lanka, but majority of migratory female domestic workers become victims of trafficking. There should be more opportunities in the field of garment sector or factories where these low educated women can be employed so that they don't have to migrate.

Gender inequality which creates domestic violence is a reason for migration. Necessary measures should be adopted to prevent domestic violence through police interventions, as well as counseling and awareness campaigns.

Programmes to make the public aware of trafficking through media are recommended. The present study revealed that trafficking issues in Sri Lanka exists due to lack of information about dangers of trafficking and insufficient penalties against traffickers. There should also be strict laws and regulations against middlemen who create the background for trafficking and proper standards implemented for employment agencies.

Policy makers have paid attention to trafficking but the main reasons its growth from a policy perspective is the confusion between trafficking and migration, lack of enforcement of laws and regulations. This has made it difficult to control trafficking or eliminate it fully. To understand the depth and breadth of the problem with the root causes of the issue and especially to formulate policies and strategies to minimize trafficking, a comprehensive understanding of theories and empirical evidence of human trafficking is required. This study contributes to the knowledge in trafficking so that measures will be taken to minimize it.

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