

**ISSUES OF CHILD TRAFFICKING
IN EASTERN SRI LANKA:
A CASE STUDY OF
BATTICALOA DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

Child trafficking affects virtually every country in the world. Children are trafficked within the country and beyond the international territory of a country. Child trafficking is an organized crime and involves in the worst forms of human rights violation including emotional, physical and sexual abuses with bleak possibilities of rescue or reintegration. It has a negative impact on the rights of children and their development. While children are entitled to all the rights that others exercise, they need special protection too because of their vulnerable age and physique, mental immaturity and inability to look after themselves.

However, it is a fundamental obligation of all States to uphold, protect, and promote the rights of children and to recognize their dignity. Accordingly, the government of Sri Lanka has taken legislative, administrative and institutional measures to protect children in accordance with her moral and legal obligations under international and domestic laws. Furthermore, State's institutional mechanism has been established by the statutes with a mandate to monitor the implementation of the rights of children at the community level.

Conversely, phenomenon of trafficking in children emerges as a matter of serious concern during the post-tsunami situation in Eastern Sri Lanka. It is realized by the researcher that certain factors increase the vulnerability of children and their parents which make them a particular target for traffickers and the State's institutions existing in the province have not been able to reduce the number of incidents of child trafficking in the province.

Therefore, this research study is aimed at evaluating the State's institutional mechanism in the context of comprehensiveness to address the motives of children and their parents effectively at community level which increase the vulnerability of children favourable for trafficking.

The field research of this study was focused in the Batticaloa district for various reasons mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study. The State's institutional mechanism which currently exist in the district, such as the Women and Children's Desks of police (WCD), the District Child Development Committee (DCDC), the Department of Probation and Child Care (DPCC) and the National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (NHRCSL) are evaluated for this study.

Child victims of trafficking were identified from 24 focus group discussions with six different categories of people from four different geographical areas and 60 individual interviews with key informants from various institutions in the district. These child victims were interviewed to examine their causes of trafficking, in addition to selected case studies. Questionnaires A were filled while interviewing the victims. Questionnaires B were administered to the selected samples of officers from the institutions to evaluate their comprehensiveness to address these motives of children.

From findings, the researcher comes to conclusion that children are trafficked within Sri Lanka and beyond the international territory of the country. The majority of child victims are trafficked by means of abduction by armed groups for using them in war activities, while a certain number of children are trafficked and ended up with various forms exploitative employment such as child labour, child sexual industry, sale of children, illegal adoption, child beggary and child pornography.

Poverty, lack of education, armed conflict, natural disaster, displacement, family violence and lack of parental care during the post-tsunami situation are identified as the major conditions/motives that increase the vulnerability of children and their parents favourable for trafficking. The State's institutions are vested with wide range of powers by the statutes under which they are

established to monitor the implementation of the rights of children at community level. The difficulty lays completely and totally on comprehensiveness of the mechanism in addressing the motives of people at community level. These institutions do not appear to have adequate knowledge, training, resources, coordination and motivation to protect children from being trafficked. The community based protection net works existing at the village level are not well utilized by the State's institutions. Lack of comprehensiveness of the State's institutional mechanism to address the conditions/motives effectively at the community level is a key factor contributing to the phenomenon of trafficking in children in Eastern Sri Lanka.

The researcher has recommended educating children on child trafficking and urging them to attend school regularly and empower their parents by creating economic opportunities for extremely vulnerable poor families, minimizing disruption of family life and empowering community based protection network. It is further recommended that the State's institutional mechanism could be empowered by providing adequate training and resources, developing guidelines on investigations, maintaining coordinated activities, establishing a resource centre, establishing victims/witness protection systems, establishing an independent international monitoring body.

This study of child trafficking is organized into six chapters. Chapter 01 is an introduction to the study. Chapter 02 imparts the theoretical background of the study. This chapter answers the questions of 'what is 'child trafficking?'; 'how trafficked children are exploited?'; 'what makes children vulnerable to trafficking?'; and 'what harm does trafficking cause children?'. Chapter 03 studies the measures taken by the State of Sri Lanka to protect and promote the rights of children. Major international and regional treaties are studied to highlight the duty of due diligence of the State to protect children from being trafficked. Chapter 04 analyses the field situation of trafficking in children for

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exploitative employment in the district of Batticaloa. Social and economic components of the district during the post-tsunami situation are analysed in this chapter. In chapter 05, the researcher highlights models for the best practices as lessons from international framework to empower the institutional mechanisms and the ways to accommodate those experiences/lessons into the context of Eastern Sri Lanka. In chapter 06, the researcher gives the conclusion of this study and suggests recommendations to explore the possibilities of 'good practices' by the State's institutional mechanism to combat trafficking in children in Eastern Sri Lanka.

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