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# Exploring the Roots and Impacts of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh: Insights from a Qualitative Study

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## ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has emerged as a significant hub in South Asia, serving as a source and transit country for trafficked individuals. Human trafficking is still a widespread problem worldwide. The socioeconomic factors that contribute to human trafficking in Bangladesh are examined in this qualitative study, as is the efficiency with which the country's existing legal and institutional frameworks deal with this complicated phenomenon. The study identifies poverty, lack of education, gender discrimination, and cultural norms as primary drivers of human trafficking through case studies. The experiences of survivors and the socioeconomic conditions that increase vulnerability are the subjects of the analysis. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive strategy that integrates strategies for prevention, protection, and prosecution as well as the fragmented nature of existing interventions. The study provides empirical insights that will help formulate effective policy and practice to combat human trafficking in Bangladesh.

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# Exploring the Roots and Impacts of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh: Insights from a Qualitative Study

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*Bangladesh has emerged as a significant hub in South Asia, serving as a source and transit country for trafficked individuals. Human trafficking is still a widespread problem worldwide. The socioeconomic factors that contribute to human trafficking in Bangladesh are examined in this qualitative study, as is the efficiency with which the country's existing legal and institutional frameworks deal with this complicated phenomenon. The study identifies poverty, lack of education, gender discrimination, and cultural norms as primary drivers of human trafficking through case studies. The experiences of survivors and the socioeconomic conditions that increase vulnerability are the subjects of the analysis. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive strategy that integrates strategies for prevention, protection, and prosecution as well as the fragmented nature of existing interventions. The study provides empirical insights that will help formulate effective policy and practice to combat human trafficking in Bangladesh.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Every nation experiences human trafficking in some way, but the underlying causes are the same.

Previous studies highlight that human trafficking is a worldwide issue that can occur anywhere, even in large cities on the other side of the world. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), countries like Bangladesh play a crucial role in both the supply and demand chains of trafficked individuals, making South Asia a significant hub for the trade (UNODC, 2020). Researchers like Shelley (2010) and Bundles (2012) have highlighted the mind boggling networks that work with dealing, frequently spreading across borders and including numerous entertainers, from selection representatives to end exploiters. Bangladesh, which is in South Asia, has emerged as a significant country for human trafficking as a source, transit, and destination. Destitution, absence of instruction, joblessness, and social imbalance are essential drivers that push weak populaces towards dealers. Hossain (2019) emphasizes that human trafficking is particularly prevalent in rural Bangladesh, where poverty rates are highest. Also, social standards and orientation segregation further fuel the weakness of ladies and kids to dealing (Amin, 2018). Various methodologies have been executed to neutralize illegal exploitation in Bangladesh. Awareness campaigns, community-based interventions, and international collaborations are examples of these. NGOs assume a critical part in casualty recovery and reintegration. However, research conducted by Karim (2021) suggests that these efforts are frequently dispersed and deficient in a unified strategy that integrates prosecution, protection, and prevention. This examination expects to give a top to bottom examination of the systems and influencing variables of illegal exploitation in Bangladesh, zeroing in on current points of view and the adequacy of existing mediations. The particular targets are to recognize

and dissect the financial, social, and political elements adding to illegal exploitation in Bangladesh and to assess the viability of current lawful and institutional structures in forestalling and battling illegal exploitation. With a focus on current perspectives, the goal of this study is to investigate and analyze the factors that influence human trafficking in Bangladesh.

## II. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploitation and coercion of individuals for labor or sexual gain is the hallmark of human trafficking, which continues to be a significant global problem. The complexities of modern slavery and human trafficking have been extensively studied and documented by scholars like Zoe Trodd and Kevin Bales (Bales & Trodd, 2008). Bales, specifically, uses stories from 95 slaves overall to show the difficulties looked by casualties and contends for complete techniques to annihilate bondage, underlining the significance of paying attention to and focusing on the voices of casualties (Parcels and Trodd, 2008). Human trafficking has existed for millennia, beginning with the African slave trade and ancient civilizations. In ancient Greece, slavery was widespread and accepted as a normal part of society, highlighting shifting social perspectives on exploitation and human rights (Great Courses, 2020). Campaigns like the 1885 London demonstrations against "white slavery" marked the beginning of international efforts to combat human trafficking in more recent centuries (Lammasniemi, 2017). These demonstrations led to the Criminal Law Amendment Act and subsequent international agreements in the early 20th century. Lawful reactions to illegal exploitation advanced over the long haul, coming full circle in global shows like the 1949 Joined Countries Show for the Concealment of the Traffic in People and the Abuse of the Prostitution of Others (Oster et al., 2020). These endeavors checked pivotal strides towards characterizing and condemning illegal exploitation, however challenges continued addressing work dealing and guaranteeing general adherence to hostile to dealing measures (Oster et al., 2020). Bangladesh, thickly populated and monetarily tested, has turned into a critical source and travel country for

illegal exploitation. The historical and socioeconomic circumstances of the nation have contributed to the vulnerabilities that human traffickers exploit. Early relocations of Bangladeshi laborers to the Center East during the 1970s presented numerous to extreme double-dealing and misuse, showing beginning difficulties in safeguarding transient specialists (Hossain and Hasnath, 1980). Ensuing reports featured dealing of ladies and kids, frequently underreported because of lacking information and fluctuating meanings of dealing (Shoban, 1989; Paul and Hasnat, 2000). Estimating the size of illegal exploitation in Bangladesh stays testing, with media reports and hierarchical information giving divided bits of knowledge. Reports demonstrate critical dealing streams to the Center East, with ladies and youngsters excessively impacted, highlighting progressing weaknesses and holes in assurance measures (MWCA, 1997; Center for the Study of Women and Children, 1998).

Even though human trafficking is widely recognized as a serious problem in Bangladesh, very little research has been done on how it actually occurs. Based on media reports, the existing information is frequently fragmented and varies significantly between governmental and NGOs. Accurate assessments of the country's scale, dynamics, and specific forms of trafficking are hampered by this gap. The following research questions will direct the study in order to fill the research gap and achieve the research objectives:

*RQ-1:* What are the primary factors that contribute to human trafficking in Bangladesh?

*RQ-2:* How effective are current institutional frameworks in preventing and prosecuting human trafficking cases in Bangladesh?

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing case studies, to explore the affecting factors of human trafficking in Bangladesh. Qualitative methods are well-suited for this study as they allow for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena and the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in or

affected by human trafficking. The study involves purposive sampling to select participants who have direct experience or expertise related to human trafficking in Bangladesh. Survivors of human trafficking willing to share their experiences have counted here with maintaining proper ethical guidelines. Case studies have been selected based on their relevance to understanding specific instances of human trafficking in Bangladesh. Cases have been chosen to represent a diversity of factors such as trafficking for labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, and child trafficking. Descriptive study has also been conducted from selected newspapers (The Daily Star and Dhaka Tribune) to explore the scenario on human trafficking. To analyze, thematic analysis has been employed. This process involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the data related to the research objectives and questions.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

The causes behind the clear development in illegal exploitation in Bangladesh are shifted and muddled. A thorough investigation is required because these variables are deeply ingrained in the socioeconomic structure of the nation.

##### *Case-1*

Siddika (alias), the youngest of four sisters, was compelled to drop out of school after three years. Because of poverty, she had to get married when she was twelve years old. A couple of years after the fact, her better half ended his own life. Siddika was left all alone to deal with her two kids and herself. A dealer reached Siddika at this weak time in her life. The human dealer exploited her shortcomings and attracted her to Saudi Arabia with the possibility of regarded and well-paying work. After significant thought, Siddika sold the ranch in her town, left her children with her mom, and loaded onto a plane for Saudi Arabia. Siddika came to Saudi Arabia with the hope of a better life and the expectation of working in a madrasa, an institution that provides Islamic education. She was, in any case, brought to a home and utilized as a homegrown partner. She immediately figured out that aspect of her responsibilities portrayal

included giving sexual blessings to her chief. Siddika wanted to get back to her Bangladeshi village as soon as she heard she had been sold. She was scared by the supervisor of Siddika. She was not eating great and was having issues nodding off. Finally, she culled up the valiance to move toward her boss, taking steps to commit suicide on the off chance that he wouldn't let her return home. Her organization helped her re-visitation of Bangladesh since they feared the lawful outcomes.

##### *Case-2*

It was deplorable to learn about Liza (not her real name), a bold lady from Bagherpara, Jashore, who uncovered the horrendous bits of insight that numerous casualties should persevere. Liza's companion had deserted her, bringing her into the dinky universe of illegal exploitation. She was constrained into prostitution by him, and through a horrendous spot of destiny, she was detained for violations she had never finished. Even after she was released, Liza was forced to stay with her abuser, which led her into a life she never wanted. Her statements demonstrated her bravery and tenacity despite the severe suffering she had endured. As she described her experience, my commitment to the cause grew stronger.

##### *Case-3*

Tori (alias), a youthful Rohingya woman, accepted that her family's circumstance would improve if she could leave the evacuee camp where she was residing and function as a lodging servant in an ocean side hotel. She was actually conned and ended up living in a brothel. The "kind aunty" who helped her get the job made her fall into forced prostitution.

##### *Case-4*

Ruhul (alias), a Rohingya father of two, thought he would leave the camp for a good job overseas. While traveling abroad in an unidentified nation, he was held captive in a storage container and subjected to severe abuse while his family was called and threatened with paying a ransom.

##### *Case-5*

Sabina (alias), a domestic servant from Chittagong, was sold in a red light district in West

Bengal six years ago. She got married when she was young and now has three children. After leaving her two young children in the care of relatives in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, the woman, who is approximately 22 years old now, traveled to Jashore with her employer. Following her significant other's second union with another lady, she started functioning as a homegrown partner. Her employer sold her to a family in India's Haldia region after escorting her to Jashore, where she was forced into prostitution for five years.

#### Case-6

Rimjhim (alias), a resident of Postogola, Dhaka, who was 17 years old, related a similar tale of treachery. She was sold by her boyfriend. The following is Rimjhim's account of how she got to be in a safe house: I was told by my boyfriend that he would take me to a nice place. I was sold as a sex specialist in India by one of his colleagues. At that point, my proprietors planned to sell her in Mumbai since she was excessively youthful. As soon as she heard it, she fled and turned herself into the police. For the past four years, the young lady has dwelled in two separate sanctuaries in India.

### V. NEWS ANALYSIS

The article on the The Daily Star titled 'Trafficking to Malaysia: Victims made to walk thru jungles, wade canals' reports on the harrowing experiences of Bangladeshi victims trafficked to Malaysia. Promises of well-paying jobs deceived victims, but instead they were exploited and abused. When they got to Malaysia, they had to go through dangerous canals and jungles. Traffickers abused many of them physically and sexually while holding them captive. Bangladeshi specialists and NGOs teamed up to save and localize these casualties back to Bangladesh.

The article features the tricky strategies utilized by dealers to bait casualties, promising rewarding open doors abroad which end up being misleading. It reveals the severe hardships endured by victims of human trafficking,

including dangerous journeys and severe exploitation in the countries of destination.

The significance of multi-agency efforts to combat human trafficking is exemplified by the rescue and support efforts of NGOs and Bangladeshi authorities. To stop this kind of trafficking and keep vulnerable people from falling prey to traffickers, the article emphasizes the need for stronger regulatory measures and education campaigns.

Another investigative report titled 'Sex trafficking: The untold exploitations of Bangladeshi women in India' focuses on the plight of Bangladeshi women trafficked into sex work in India. It demonstrates the systematic exploitation and abuse of these women, who are frequently duped into believing they are working legitimate jobs. Once in India, they are constrained into whorehouses, exposed to viciousness, and denied their fundamental common liberties. This exploitation is perpetuated by traffickers, brothel owners, and corrupt officials, as the article reveals.

The article features how neediness and absence of chances make Bangladeshi ladies defenseless against dealing plans, where commitments of business are utilized as a trap. It describes in detail the appalling conditions in which trafficked women are kept, including the physical and sexual abuse they endure as well as the psychological trauma they go through. Local authorities and law enforcement agencies' complicity in the trafficking network demonstrates the systemic difficulties in combating cross-border trafficking and prosecuting those responsible. The requirement for upgraded two-sided collaboration between Bangladesh and India to battle dealing and safeguard casualties is underlined.

Another article reports on the repatriation of 23 trafficking victims from India through the Benapole border. The victims, including women and children, had been trafficked for various forms of exploitation, including labor and sex work. The people in question, including ladies and youngsters, had been dealt with different types of abuse, including work and sex work. They received psychological and medical assistance

upon their return to Bangladesh after being rescued with the assistance of local NGOs and law enforcement agencies.

The article emphasizes the significance of cross-border cooperation and the coordinated efforts made by authorities in Bangladesh and India to rescue and return trafficking victims. It demonstrates how important it is for non-governmental organizations to provide victims with immediate assistance, including medical care and psychological support upon their return. The difficulties that repatriated victims face, such as stigma and reintegration into society and the economy, emphasize the need for long-term rehabilitation and support services. It is emphasized that stronger preventative measures and awareness campaigns are needed to stop people from being trafficked and protect vulnerable populations, especially in border regions where trafficking is common.

## VI. DISCUSSION

When we read the aforementioned accounts, the most striking aspect is how badly they were treated as a result of being trafficked. However, everyone ought to consider what brought them there in the first place. Among the many factors that contribute to an increase in this horrible crime in Bangladesh are poverty, gender discrimination, social exclusion, illiteracy, broken families, a poor border system, a lack of religious knowledge, lenient punishments for traffickers, the search for work, a better life, a lack of awareness, and a lack of accountability on the part of the agencies that send a significant number of people abroad as laborers or workers. However, the following factors have been identified for this discussion:

*Poverty:* Destitution is a significant supporter of illegal exploitation. It has the potential to motivate individuals to become human traffickers and parents to sell their children or other members of their family into slavery. 27 million people are living in extreme poverty in Bangladesh, and another 31% live in chronic poverty in less developed areas<sup>68</sup>. In these circumstances, people living in poverty are willing

to take any job opportunity they can find. Traffickers target the poor, promising them a way to make money when, in fact, they will get nothing and be treated like slaves. Poverty also significantly contributes to many other trafficking root causes, such as encouraging people to migrate, making it difficult to obtain education and legitimate work, making it impossible to recover from war and disaster, and so on.

*Lack of education:* An absence of instruction can prompt diminished open doors for work at a living pay, and it can likewise prompt a piece of diminished information on freedoms. People may be more susceptible to human trafficking as a result of either outcome. In the anticipation of dealing, training can likewise enable youngsters to cause changes locally as they become older which will forestall circumstances and weaknesses of which dealers make use.

*Geography:* Bangladesh's topography plays a critical part in the country's illegal exploitation issues. It is near the Bay locale, which interfaces it to South Asia. Individuals are shipped on boats to the 18 travel focuses along the India-Bangladesh line, which is utilized to sneak youngsters and ladies out of the country.<sup>69</sup> Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, and Sylhet's boundary regions are habitually utilized as land courses for dealing. The northern districts of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Thakurgoan, Dinajpur, Naogoan, Chapai Nawabganj, and Rajshahi, as well as the southern districts of Jessore and Satkhira, are where women and children are most at risk of being trafficked. Since there are three Muslim Rohingya evacuee camps in this locale, Cox's Marketplace is a famous area for the enlistment of youngsters and ladies to be dealt with.

*Unemployment:* Bangladesh is a center in light of its topography as well as a result of its shortage of occupations and assets. Since they need to work, individuals are effortlessly tricked into becoming casualties of illegal exploitation. The joblessness rate is 5.20 percent, and the typical month-to-month compensation is \$80.<sup>71</sup> Human dealers exploit this by drawing clueless individuals into

work tricks. In reality, traffickers use desperate individuals in a variety of torture, prostitution, and labor schemes after promising a good job in another country. The number of people who are trafficked would be significantly reduced if the economy expanded more.

*High Demand for Sex/Sexual Adventure:* Because of the strict limitations in Bangladesh, open sexual associations with the other gender are disliked. As indicated by fundamental financial matters, an organic market should exist for a market to frame. Consequently, requests for modest popularized sex set out open doors for dealers to take advantage of. About 100,000 women and young girls are thought to be working as prostitutes, but less than 10% of them do so voluntarily. Constrained sex work is an issue influencing ladies and young ladies all over Bangladesh, yet the nation seldom condemns it. Out of 6,000 individuals that specialists captured for sex dealing-related wrongdoings, just 25 individuals got a conviction.<sup>72</sup> Dealers can rake in tons of cash by delivering labor and products with modest or free work and selling them at a greater cost. Popularized sex is a rewarding business sector since there are in every case new purchasers and the costs are high. This implies that dealers and pimps are the ones in particular who benefit from their casualties.

*The Low Caste Status:* Because of their low status, law enforcement does not protect this vulnerable group, so traffickers prey on them; their families, and, surprisingly, the general public where they live, are threatening them. Dealers accept they can pull off their activities all the more effectively because these gatherings know nothing about essential basic liberties regulations and can't safeguard themselves against them.

*Women and Girls' Social Vulnerability:* Bangladesh is a male-centric culture where men are viewed as financial suppliers and ladies as wards whose jobs are restricted to natural proliferation. Because of this, there are different gender roles, each with its own set of values and standards. Once more, the philosophy of sexuality is based on this, with men controlling ladies'

sexuality. Again, this idea of controlling and protecting women puts them in a vulnerable position of being exploited, where the smallest sexual deviation or social dislocation makes them "polluted" and the target of social degradation. Because they serve as unpaid family helpers, the majority of female children develop a dependency mentality as they grow up in a male-dominated environment. The teaching of girl children how to be effective "housewives" in both rural and urban settings through their participation in household chores is regarded as a method of preparing them for marriage. The girls are at risk of being abused even within the family. Their day-to-day environments and rules can once in a while imperil their well-being.

*Inadequate legitimate economic opportunities:* Whenever individuals need genuine monetary chances, they are more powerless against illegal exploitation. Migrants without work permits, people without an education, people who live in rural areas where there are fewer jobs, women, and people of certain ethnic groups who might be discriminated against are especially at risk in this area. Traffickers lure people who are unable to find work elsewhere into forced labor, sex trafficking, bonded labor, and other forms of exploitation by offering them jobs that appear to be legitimate.

*Cultural Myths:* There are reports that one of the primary drivers of the rising interest for little kids is the fantasy that intercourse with a virgin can fix a man of physically communicated sicknesses (sexually transmitted diseases) and revive him. Additionally, it is a widely held belief that having sex with a female child does not cause sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Victims of human trafficking may also be discouraged from speaking out or identifying their traffickers due to cultural factors like fear or respect for the elderly, particularly if they are poor and belong to groups that do not protect human rights.

*Dowry and Divorce:* Divorce and dowry are frequent contributors. In light of their powerlessness to pay a settlement, guardians are much of the time unfit to offer their little girls.



Sometimes, the girls are married off to much older men to avoid paying a dowry. This can bring about early widowhood, conjugal disappointment, or partition. The authorization of polygamy supports separation and departure, regularly on the grounds of non-installment of endowment or post-conjugal share requests. According to the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, men must obtain permission from the Union Parishad Chairman based on consent from the first wife before remarrying. Women who resist are frequently left behind, and men generally ignore this requirement. Both polygamy and the possession of dowries have been linked to an increase in instances of domestic violence and the separation of partners.

*Natural Disasters:* Bangladesh experiences a lot of natural disasters, including floods, cyclones, and river erosion. They rarely visit a nation with sufficient destructive power to leave behind misery. Indeed, they are significant and active roadblocks to the growth of our state. These variables add to monetary uncertainty and an absence of basic liberties, giving dealers a benefit and making individuals more defenseless against illegal exploitation circumstances. A few cataclysmic events can make individuals escape their homes and nations, making them more defenseless against dealers, particularly on the off chance that they are searching for work or paying bootleggers to get to their objective. Additionally, as the economy declines, traffickers will have more opportunities to entice victims into trafficking by posing as employment opportunities.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Analysis finds that human trafficking is more than just a criminal act; it is also a result of systemic issues like poverty, unemployment, gender discrimination, and social inequalities. The instances of Siddika, Liza, Tori, Ruhul, Sabina, and Rimjhim show the frightening individual stories behind the measurements, exhibiting how dealers exploit weaknesses and misleading vows to trap people in patterns of misuse and double-dealing. Notwithstanding different meditations, including local area-based

drives, mindfulness missions, and global joint efforts, the endeavors to battle illegal exploitation in Bangladesh stay divided and lacking. Lawful and institutional structures frequently miss the mark in giving extensive security, counteraction, and arraignment, as verified in the examinations by Karim (2021). While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in victim rehabilitation and reintegration, for more effective outcomes, a cohesive strategy that incorporates all aspects of trafficking prevention is required.

The investigation of contextual analyses and news stories further underlines the intricacy of illegal exploitation and the requirement for a comprehensive way to deal with and address it. Trafficking thrives in the context of underlying socioeconomic conditions, cultural myths, and inadequate economic opportunities. Additionally, these vulnerabilities are exacerbated by natural disasters and geographical factors, making particular populations and regions particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Accurately assessing the scope, dynamics, and specific forms of human trafficking in Bangladesh is a significant research gap. Based on media reports, the existing information is frequently fragmented and varies significantly between governments and NGOs. The development of specific strategies to effectively combat human trafficking is hampered by this gap.

Future research should focus on collecting and analyzing comprehensive data, including detailed victim profiles, trafficking routes, and the roles of various actors in trafficking networks, to fill this research gap. Upgraded techniques, for example, blended strategy approaches consolidating subjective and quantitative information, would give a more nuanced comprehension of the issue.

To battle illegal exploitation really, there should be a purposeful work to address its main drivers. This incorporates working on financial open doors, upgrading instructive access, implementing stricter legitimate measures against dealers, and offering powerful help frameworks for casualties. Cross-line participation and thorough two-sided

arrangements between nations, especially among Bangladesh and its adjoining nations, are fundamental to upset dealing organizations and safeguarding weak populaces. In the end, the fight against human trafficking in Bangladesh will only be successful if the government, civil society, and international partners all commit to it for a long time. It is possible to create a safer environment where individuals are protected from exploitation and can pursue their lives with dignity and security by addressing the underlying factors, bridging research gaps, and strengthening response mechanisms.

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