Stolen Lives
DIGNITY, FORGIVENESS, HOPE, AND FUTURE-MINDEDNESS FOR VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

by Victor Joseph, D.Min.
edited by Kent R. Hill, Ph.D.
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Foreword by Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr.

Much has been written about the phenomenon of global sex trafficking in general terms, and the reality and statistics are truly staggering. But what is often missing in the analysis from “thirty thousand feet” is the agonizing depth of suffering experienced by the multitude of individuals buried in the statistics. Though the suffering has been presented well in both written materials and in films or documentaries, it is rare that serious discussion takes place as to just how the victims perceive what they have experienced or how to move victims towards recovery. In short, what can be done to restore the stolen lives of the often young victims of this widespread tragedy? It is this challenge that this modest publication seeks to address.

A Passion for Healing

The John Templeton Foundation was fortunate to find two dedicated human rights advocates to collaborate on the challenge of recovery for sex trafficking victims: Dr. Victor Joseph as author and Dr. Kent R. Hill as editor.

Dr. Victor Joseph is the originator of this project and conducted the primary research. He is an Indian activist and educator in the United States, who has worked for more than seven years with the Office of Religious Freedom at the U.S. Department of State, Congress, and the White House as an advocate for religious freedom addressing the human rights issues in many nations, including India.

Dr. Joseph’s education and teaching background in world religions, and his research in psychology, culture, and communication, have prompted him to undertake this project in order to raise awareness of the psychological impact on young girls of their long captivity and abuse as sex trafficking victims. He is passionately committed to finding ways to provide hope, self-determination, and a better future for these young women.

Dr. Kent R. Hill, currently Vice President for Character Development at the John Templeton Foundation, was an Assistant Administrator at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) between 2001 and 2009. While in charge of the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia and then of the Global Health Bureau, Dr. Hill served as the principal USAID liaison to the U.S. government interagency working group to combat trafficking worldwide.

Dr. Hill has a Ph.D. in history, is an expert on international development, human rights, and religious freedom, and has had oversight responsibility for several million dollars of U.S. anti-trafficking programs in a variety of countries. He also has been directly engaged in U.S. anti-trafficking work in India.

Trafficking is a particularly pernicious and vicious assault on individual dignity. How do the victims deal with the shame of what has happened to them? How do they forgive, if it is even deemed possible to forgive, those who have trampled on their dignity, and how is it possible for the victims to forgive themselves? How do the victims recover or establish a sense of control of their own lives and destinies? How do they regain hope and belief in the future? What if they had almost no sense of control in the first place? The focus of this study by Dr. Joseph, based on careful survey analysis, is on seeking to provide the beginnings of some answers to those all-important questions. The restoration of hope and a sense of empowerment to affect one’s life is a goal fully consistent with my father’s life-long commitment to promote “future-mindedness.”

My father believed that an essential component of a fulfilled and meaningful life was the ability to focus on the future:

To be a “successful dreamer” requires that one take some kind of action to bring the dream into manifestation. This fact can serve as encouragement for each of us that our dreams can come true when we activate them! And activate is the key word. Futuristic vision often lies seeded in the rich soil of adventurous souls and minds.1

The question is how can we help the victims of sex trafficking unleash the inner power to dream again and then to act on those dreams?

Coming to terms with the past is part of the answer, and in the best of circumstances, that can involve forgiveness of self (realizing and accepting that one is not to blame) and under ideal circumstances even forgiving those who abused you, or at least escaping the burden of all-consuming anger and bitterness. At some point, to have hope for the future must involve being able to focus on what one has to be thankful for, even if it is only that one has miraculously escaped the prison of sex slavery and that now there is some hope of shaping one’s own future by one’s actions, thoughts, and plans. As my father put it:

When we fill our minds with blessings and gratitude, an inner shift in consciousness can occur. As we focus on the abundance in our lives rather than on what we lack, a wonderful blueprint for the future begins to emerge.2

It is inappropriate and necessary for the world community, and for India, to enact laws to prohibit trafficking and to prosecute vigorously those guilty of the offense trafficking in persons. It is entirely right to address the deeper issues of poverty and to launch information campaigns to warn potential victims of trafficking of what not to believe.

But compassion and our own basic humanity require us to focus much more seriously than we have to date on the hard and critical task of restoring dignity and hope to those who have been victimized by this offense against humanity.

It is the hope of the John Templeton Foundation that on the basis of the research and careful analysis of Victor Joseph and his colleagues, using India as a case study, we will begin a conversation that results in concrete progress towards the recovery and restoration of hope for the victims of trafficking in persons.

John M. Templeton, Jr., M.D.
President and Chairman
John Templeton Foundation

2 Ibid, 85.
Introduction

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery that violates basic human rights and human dignity, including the right to life, liberty, and security; freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; the right to a home and family, education, and proper employment, and the right to health. It is a crime that has shocked the global conscience and has been made the subject of national acts and international human rights covenants.

The United States Department of State defines human trafficking as “all acts involved in the transport, harboring, or sale of persons within national or across international borders through coercion, force, kidnapping, deception or fraud, for purposes of placing persons in situations of forced labor or services, such as forced prostitution, domestic servitude, debt bondage, or other slavery-like practice.” Approximately 700,000 people (the majority of whom are women and children) are trafficked across nations and international borders each year.

Sex Trafficking as a Form of Human Trafficking

Sex trafficking, a sector of the human trafficking industry, is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.” Interpol estimates show that the global human trafficking trade is a $32 billion-a-year business, with revenues from sex trafficking alone accounting for $19 billion. Interpol’s approximation of sex trafficking revenue is a conservative one. In 2005, the International Labor Organization put the total for sex trafficking at $217.9 billion. Experts agree that the human trafficking industry is still growing, despite efforts to combat it. Interpol estimates show that the global human trafficking trade is a $32 billion-a-year business, with revenues from sex trafficking alone accounting for $19 billion. Interpol’s approximation of sex trafficking revenue is a conservative one. In 2005, the International Labor Organization put the total for sex trafficking at $217.9 billion. Because international human trafficking operates within a largely clandestine, underground market, it is difficult to measure accurately the industry’s scope or pinpoint any exact financial statistics. Although estimates vary, experts agree that the human trafficking industry is still growing, despite efforts to combat it.

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Young Victims of Sex Trafficking

The stories of the girls who were interviewed for this report all have a very similar plot. Every girl was sold into a brothel. Husbands, boyfriends, relatives, family friends, and human trafficking brokers have all been the suppliers who have sold the girls into brothels. These girls can be as young as eight years of age. Most of them come from poor families. Traffickers approach their family and offer help to get out of debt. The parents are told by the abductors that their daughters are going to a rich family as housemaids or to the city to work in a factory. For many parents, it is a relief and a good opportunity to escape generational poverty. Both the parents and the girls have dreams for the future. However, once they arrive at the brothel, the girls become slaves.

Regardless of their age or health, once trafficking victims are inside, they are forced to see customers on a regular basis and earn a profit for the brothel owner. Only a small portion of the money actually goes to the girls. They are generally forced to see many customers in one day. If girls who refuse to comply are often beaten or tortured in the brothel. Many do not know when it is day or night, as they are locked inside without windows or access to the outside world. As part of their punishment for disobedience, they will not be given food or water for days, until they submit to the degrading “work” of the brothel. Other methods of torture include beating, the pouring of hot water, physical burning and scarring with hot pans and cigarette lighters, and forced group rape by use of straps to tie them down. The torture these girls and women undergo is horrific. It causes severe physical and emotional scarring.

Many of these girls had never heard of a brothel until they found themselves imprisoned in one. At a young age, instead of playing with their peers, they are forced into slavery and experience severe brutality. They can expect no kindness or sympathy from the brothel owners or supervisors. To keep them submissive, the girls are subjected to physical and emotional torture. They are blackmailed. The brothel owners threaten to tell their parents about their profession. The girls fear this the most, because they know that if their village discovers where they are and what they are doing, it will affect their family’s status and dignity, and the family may face possible expulsion from the village. These girls love their parents and siblings and thus often endure the suffering in silence. In India, community is all important. Without a community, there is no existence.

Girls who are in the broths feel guilty and embarrassed. They want to keep their existence and involuntary lifestyle a secret. Once a girl is in slavery, she can be there for the rest of her life. For many, perhaps most, there is no escape apart from becoming too ill, old, or unattractive to be exploited any longer by the brothel owners. Even if girls receive their freedom through many years of service, they do not want to return to their village. Any girls coming out of the brothel are almost certainly sick in body, mind, and spirit. No one can escape sexual slavery as a healthy person. The health challenges can be life-threatening.

7 Ibid. §108.
Stolen Lives

Introduction

For many years, I have agonized over the human rights violations and suffering of the young victims of sexual trafficking. The issue is deeply personal and particularly poignant, since India is my place of birth. I know firsthand that it is often children and women who are the victims of corruption, abuse, and torture, and they are the most neglected and vulnerable individuals in Indian society. The stories of those who are suffering are graphic, and I consider it my God-given duty to bring attention to that suffering and to help alleviate it—to help restore hope to those who have none.

I fully support Sir John Templeton's commitment to advance "future-mindedness." For me, this is the God-given ability to believe in the future, to escape the bonds of the past. Future-mindedness is an intensely personal possession of each individual. It is the trafficking victim who must play the main role while the support system around her can and should do its part to be supportive. In the end, the motivation has to be found somehow within, though it can be encouraged from without.

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the trafficking problem from the victim's perspective and to present some modest suggestions as to how that which has been stolen can be regained, to help in the creation of a sense of self-worth and power over one's destiny. For some, this will mean accepting a sense of self-determination which they did not possess even before being trafficked. If this publication can inspire others to get involved in this important effort, then one of the key purposes of this project will have been realized.

Outline of the Study

Before presenting the experiences of the trafficked women with respect to anger, shame, healing, hope and future-mindedness, forgiveness, and God, it is imperative that we consider the broad question of trafficking in India (Chapter 1), including the fact that economic factors dramatically increase a young person's vulnerability to being sucked into the vortex of the trafficking hell. It is essential that a brief portrait be given of the Indian cultural and religious context within which the degradation of trafficking are lived out, focusing on the challenge of karma (which can result, but does not have to result, in fatalism) and the low status of children and women in Indian society and culture. Addressing these cultural and religious factors is crucial because dealing with shame, forgiveness, recovery of dignity and a sense of control over one's life, and ultimately, the ability to live a life of hope despite the past, all depend on healing taking place against the backdrop of specific cultural and religious factors which have shaped the young women even before they were trafficked.

Chapter 2 contains the heart of the book’s research findings. Two specific portraits are provided for each experience dealt with (anger, shame, healing, hope and future-mindedness, forgiveness, and God), it is imperative that we consider the broad question of trafficking in India (Chapter 1), including the fact that economic factors dramatically increase a young person's vulnerability to being sucked into the vortex of the trafficking hell. It is essential that a brief portrait be given of the Indian cultural and religious context within which the degradation of trafficking are lived out, focusing on the challenge of karma (which can result, but does not have to result, in fatalism) and the low status of children and women in Indian society and culture. Addressing these cultural and religious factors is crucial because dealing with shame, forgiveness, recovery of dignity and a sense of control over one's life, and ultimately, the ability to live a life of hope despite the past, all depend on healing taking place against the backdrop of specific cultural and religious factors which have shaped the young women even before they were trafficked.

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Chapter 3 addresses the key findings from the research and suggests a way forward to promote recovery. Specific follow-up recommendations will also be made to various local, national, and international entities, particularly with respect to steps that can facilitate recovery.

Two sobering messages emerge loud and clear from the moving interviews recounted in this publication. First, economic desperation creates vulnerability for young girls which cannot be ignored. Thus, anything which can be done to address unemployment and poverty will be of immense help. To be sure, many are desperately poor escape human trafficking; but those who are caught in the web of trafficking were invariably first made vulnerable by economic factors. Second, very often those trafficked were first the tragic victims of lies by unscrupulous “friends” and strangers. Thus, it is imperative that much more be done to warn young people about the realities of sexual trafficking and the false promises which often lead to it. These are not new messages, and many groups are trying to do something about both, but this publication will provide further graphic evidence that these are important priorities.

The Recovery of Hope

The reason that trafficking in persons is a crime against humanity is because each and every person deserves the opportunity to live with dignity and a sense of self-worth. When that dignity is stolen, we must do more than protest and prevent that dignity from being stolen from others in the future. Justice and compassion demand of us that we contribute to the restoration of that stolen dignity and that we assist in the birth or rebirth of hope. We must foster anew the belief that those once abused can play a major role in shaping their own destinies. For many, the difficult issue of forgiveness of both themselves and those involved in their trafficking will have to be squarely faced before self-worth can be reestablished and control of one's destiny achieved. Nor can self-worth and independence be achieved if there is not serious attention to economic self-sufficiency. There are no magic bullets, and ultimate success depends on material, psychological, and spiritual factors. It will not be easy, but it is possible, and it is surely worth the effort.

Methodology

The case study methodology used in the research for this project was intended to explore the psychological effects of sexual slavery on its victims and answer the following questions:

- **Is forgiveness possible? Is it necessary for healing to occur?**
- **How do these girls/women envision future-mindedness—the capacity to have faith in the future and their ability to shape it?**
- **Can the victims of sex trafficking escape fatalistic views of themselves and the world and come to believe in their own capacity to determine their futures?**

This case study was primarily conducted in two major cities in India (December 2007 and January 2008). In New Delhi, I conducted surveys in two different rehabilitation and rescue centers, while in Mumbai, five centers were used for data collection. Due to the sensitivity of this topic, the names of these centers are not authorized for release.

One hundred interviews were conducted with formerly trafficked victims who ranged from thirteen to thirty years of age. The majority of the girls were still teenagers. These victims were either currently residing at rehabilitation centers or were still in the brothel business. A standardized questionnaire was used for each interview (see Appendix A). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. During every interview, at least one staff member from the center was present for interpretation and to create a more comfortable atmosphere for the interviewees. In Mumbai, Dr. Pricilla Paul, head of the Department of Applied Psychology (2008), University of Mumbai, joined in the interview process. The participants all chose to participate in the study and received no incentives to do so. They volunteered to help with this study, hoping that it would benefit others.

Most participants were uncomfortable being recorded by an audio device during the interview process. Only a few granted permission to do so. However, all of them participated with the
questionnaire format and responded genuinely to the questions. All of the participants wished to remain anonymous. In addition, the participants asked that no exact details be released regarding their geographical origin or any other specific details that could identify them. As such, names of victims and the locations of their childhood have been altered to preserve their anonymity.

In addition to interviewing trafficked girls, staff members from the rehabilitation centers were interviewed as well as others involved in human trafficking issues at the NGO level. Additional information was collected from Dr. Pricilla Paul; Dr. Prashant Saravade, a medical doctor who attended the trafficked girls; Dr. John Dayal, a national activist and member of the National Integration Council, Government of India, the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi; and the U.S. Consulate General Office in Mumbai.

Qualitative questions within the questionnaire have been calculated statistically. Some of the most poignant results of this study are presented in the findings portion of this case study.

Finally, a brief note on the use of “girls” and “women” in the text. There is no easy line between being a “girl” and a “woman,” no magic age at which the transformation clearly occurs. Because so much of the sex trafficking of females in India, and much of the rest of the world, is of the very, very young, there can be no question that it is often “girls,” even before puberty, who are the victims of this crime against humanity. But after a few months or years in a brothel, even if just thirteen or fourteen years of age, a young girl can become a hardened woman, with knowledge of the world well beyond what any woman much older should have to possess. Often the text will read “girls and women,” but suffice it to say when there is reference just to “girls,” this is meant simply to acknowledge that much of the time what we are talking about sadly involves very, very young females – the most vulnerable of the human family.

It should be noted also that case studies or stories given in Chapter 2 are almost all from girls who are 17 years of age or younger. The overall surveys and research, however, included a few women who were between the ages of 20 and 29.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express deep appreciation to the John Templeton Foundation for funding this project. I am especially indebted to Dr. Arthur Schwartz, Executive Vice President of the Foundation, for his critical early role in helping to frame the analytical structure of the publication and to Dr. Kent R. Hill for his skilled editorial supervision. Special thanks are also due to Rebecca Beeman for her assistance working on the manuscript, and to Pamela Thompson, Vice President for Communications. I am grateful to all of our colleagues at the John Templeton Foundation for their support and guidance during this project.

Special thanks are due to all the non-governmental organizations and interviewees in New Delhi and Mumbai, India who participated in this important and sensitive research project. In addition, Dr. Pricilla Paul and Rev. Jomon Mathew should be acknowledged for their support and assistance during research time in India. I want to acknowledge the U.S. Embassy and Mumbai U.S. Consulate officials in India for their contribution, insight, and support for this project, and I am deeply grateful to all of our friends in the U.S. Congress for their support and encouragement to go forward with this research study.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Elizabeth Joseph, son Jason Mathew Joseph, and daughter Megan-Victoria Joseph for helping and assisting me in all stages of this work, from research in India through the completion of the final text of the publication.
# Trafficking in India

Human trafficking is a relatively common occurrence in India. Ninety percent of human trafficking is internal, while the remaining 10% comes from Nepal, Bangladesh, and other neighboring countries. Human trafficking takes place in different forms throughout India, including sex tourism, child labor, and bonded labor. As mentioned above, due to the underground nature of the business, there are no empirical studies available that can present accurate figures of human trafficking in India. The numbers provided by the government and different NGOs are only speculative and the true magnitude of the problem is not fully known. It is reported, however, that India is the main recipient of an estimated 150,000 women and girls trafficked into India from South Asia to feed the commercial sex industry. Moreover, India is also a source and transit country for the sex trafficking of women and children from and for the Middle East.

## Causes of Human Trafficking in India

There are many factors which contribute to human trafficking in India. They include:

**Poverty:** More than 42% of the Indian people are economically deprived. Most of these people live in poor villages. Some parents, though obviously not most, feel compelled to send their children to work in order to ease their poverty. In Indian culture, parents generally value their sons over their daughters. One of the main reasons for this, according to Indian culture, is that sons are the ones who will carry on the family name.

Girls are more expensive because of the dowry system. Whenever parents get the opportunity to send their daughters for child labor, many are willing to so. Most of them end up in brothels or some kind of sexual slavery in India.

**Lack of Education:** Many Indian villages do not have schools. The schools that do exist are in very poor condition. Teachers lack incentive to work in the villages because of the poor salaries offered, inadequate work environments, and transportation issues. As a result, most of the children have little to no education. This creates an environment ripe for traffickers to make false promises to parents, luring them to send their girls away for a chance at better education, domestic work, and other “good” opportunities that would otherwise be unattainable in their lifetimes.

**Caste System:** India still functions with the caste system. The lower castes, which contain the majority of the population, have less opportunity for advancement than those in the higher castes. The lower castes are vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation in Indian society. The upper castes intimidate, manipulate, and coerce lower caste girls for sexual pleasure.

## Education Level Age at Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Girls Who</th>
<th>Percentage of Girls Who</th>
<th>Percentage of Girls Who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have Nightmares</td>
<td>Age 8-12</td>
<td>Age 13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Who Currently</td>
<td>Age 16-20</td>
<td>Age 21+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls Who Feel Guilty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Who Feel Angry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES: In Indian culture, boys are preferred over girls. This preference is apparent even at conception, since many girls are aborted when their sex is learned. The use of ultrasound to detect the baby’s gender is extremely prevalent in India today. Women undergo ultrasounds to determine the sex of their unborn babies in order to decide whether or not to abort. Doctors offer scanning and abortion for Rs. 3600 (approximately $80.00) if it is a girl. Doctors make more money aborting girls than they do taking care of their other patients. Experts estimate that this business can earn them between $100,000 and $200,000 a year. As a result of the bias against females, there is a discrepancy in the boy-girl ratio in India. For every 1000 boys, there are only 980 girls. Girls are sometimes trafficked as housemaids so that the boys in a house can have a common girl within the house. After a couple of years, she will be sold into the brothels, and the family gets another girl for the boys. This is a trend that occurs mainly in the northern part of India.18

CITY LIFE DREAMS: For the village people, the city represents a dream of a better life. When traffickers offer their daughters a job in the city, the villagers hope that one day the rest of the family can move to the city.

POOR AWARENESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND BROTHEL LIFE: The village people are illiterate. A trafficker, through persuasive promises, can easily mislead them. Most of the people are unaware of human trafficking and its connection to prostitution that takes place in brothels and other places in major cities.

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES: Mental, physical, and emotional abuse of children is very common in the villages and throughout Indian society. This abuse, as well as family poverty and neglect, often compel children to leave their homes. Most of them end up in the hands of traffickers.

DEVADASI TRADITION: The devadasi system is still prevalent in some states in India, particularly in the south, including in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Daughters are dedicated to the Lord Shiva when they are very young for temple service. These young women are known as temple dancers. In the southern part of India, families offer their daughters to the goddess Yellamma. People believe that by doing so, they will bring prosperity and good luck in their lives. Once a girl is dedicated to the temple, the parents consider their daughter to be dead. These girls live inside the temple and become the slave of the lord. In the physical sense, the lord is the husband. Sexual abuse takes place by the priest, family members, and those who visit the temple. This sexual abuse takes place as early as eight years of age. After a couple of years of service to the temple, trafficking brokers take the girls to brothels and sell them. The brokers offer good money and opportunity in big cities. These young people are brainwashed by their parents and society to believe that this is their lot in life and there is no other way they can live. Many young people come into slavery through the devadasi system.

Who Are the Traffickers?

- Parents
- Relatives
- Friends of families
- Neighbors
- Strangers or Recruiters
- Lovers
- Malai agents
- Neighbors or friends who returned from abroad to recruit and traffic girls to other countries
- Drug dealers

BEDIA TRIBE: The Bedias believe that they are born as sex workers. They are primarily located in Madhya Pradesh but are also in Rajasthan and parts of Uttar Pradesh. The Bedias train their girls at a young age to be prostitutes, sometimes as early as 8-9 years old. They expect all girls to become prostitutes. Fathers, sons, and other relatives find customers for their daughters. They have done this for generations. They also sell their daughters to the brothels to make money. When a Bedia girl is married at a young age, her husband finds customers for his wife. If he wants to make more money, he sells her to the brothel. Besides clubs, massage parlors, and sex racketing ring facilities, the main two prostitution centers are brothel-based and family-based.

CORRUPTION IN INDIA: Corruption is widespread and has seeped into the political system, thus contributing to poverty, human trafficking, decaying infrastructure, inequality in wealth distribution, social injustice, and the widespread giving and taking of bribes. According to a Transparency International (TI) report on global corruption, India has fallen to 74th place on the list of 180 nations evaluated. Widespread unemployment, the desire to make a quick profit with little effort, and the broad existence of gangs create an atmosphere conducive for trafficking in persons to thrive.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY: In the last several years, political instability in the country has contributed to lawlessness and an inability of the government to contain the criminal activities that have resulted. In order to maintain stability, political parties have been forced to placate one another with favors and concessions which allow for extensive “cover ups” that often go unnoticed within society. The police are often not independent entities in India. Instead, each state’s force is managed by a political leader who controls their daily activities. As a result, the police are drawn into the corruption of the political system.

LACK OF LEGAL CONVICTIONS AGAINST THE TRAFFICKERS: The Indian court system is congested due to an increasing crowding of dockets. The heightened crime rate in India makes it less beneficial for the traffickers to remain undetected for long. Even when convicted, sentences are frequently avoided due to the resource constraints of the court system. The writs of petition that come to the high court of India will often take eight to ten years to be heard.26

HIGH MARKET DEMAND FOR MINOR GIRLS: Worldwide there is a high demand for minor girls in the sex trade. India is no different. Minor girls are easy targets for exploitation. They are afraid to speak out about the crimes that are committed against them, and they typically remain very obedient to the customers. Foreign tourists prefer minor girls for both their youthful appearances and their submissiveness to them. Young girls are very desirable for both brothel owners and customers.23

Years in Bondage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Who Are the Customers?

**MARRIED MEN:** There are many reasons married men go to brothels.

- **Joint-family system:** Families often live together in a small house with many people and no privacy. As a result, married men look for sex in the brothels.
- **Unsatisfied married life:** Due to socio-economic deprivation, many men are unhappy with their married lives. Due to this lack of satisfaction, they seek pleasure at brothels.
- **Wife’s illness:** Often, married men will look toward brothels to find pleasure when their wives are sick at home and can no longer satisfy them.
- **Economic boom:** As men have more money, they have the means to purchase sex and believe there is nothing wrong in doing so. With higher demand for commercial sex comes an increase in the trafficking in persons.

**BUSINESS PEOPLE:** Indian cities are economically booming. Drivers, employees, and other business people who stay in big cities without their families have money and seek pleasure in the brothels. In addition, more and more affluent businessmen involved in film, advertising, the diamond market, and politics are becoming part of an expanding brothel clientele.

**TOURISTS:** India promotes tourism for economic growth. It has become a multi-billion dollar annual business in India. Due to the prevalence of the sex industry and a feeling of invincibility, many tourists go to India to visit brothels, massage parlors, and other facilities where thousands of new, young girls are trafficked in order to cater to their needs. These tourists come from all over the world. The majority are from Arab nations but also from the United States and Europe. As currency exchange is often in their favor, customers from these parts of the world can receive sexual pleasure for little cost and they have no scruples about doing so. Rich businessmen from Arab nations come to purchase girls who are not infected by HIV or any other sicknesses. They look for young, light-skinned, fresh girls. Due to this demand, human trafficking is increasing every year. These Arabs also temporarily marry young girls, take them home, and keep them for a few years as sexual slaves in their homes before divorcing them and sending them back. These girls often then end up in brothels.

**TRUCK DRIVERS, TAXI DRIVERS, HOMELESS PEOPLE, GANGS, AND CRIMINALS:** These are among the largest groups in India who visit brothels and engage in illicit sexual activities. Many of them contract and spread AIDS due to their reckless sexual behavior.

**SUPERSTITIOUS PEOPLE:** There is a myth and superstition in the Arab and Indian worlds that if a man who has a terminal illness, including AIDS, has sexual relations with a minor who is a virgin, he will be cured. Since this belief is prevalent, many men go to brothels and other similar places to be “cured.” Even people who believe that AIDS can be cured have sex with a minor, they will be cured. Some believe that sex with a minor will bring good luck and dispel bad.

**BUYERS OF PORNOGRAPHY:** Pornographic material is also culprit. Within the red-light district, there are many movie theaters that show pornographic films which promote sexual activities. College students and other men are frequent customers of these films, and they often visit the brothels after watching such material. With an increase in the number of customers comes a corresponding increase in human trafficking in India. As pornography has become increasingly popular and accessible through the worldwide web and DVD distribution for a variety of viewers, including teenagers, many massage parlors, call-girl centers, lodges, nightclubs, and brothels have opened throughout India.

**CORRUPT UNDERGROUND WORLD:** Corruption amongst businesses within India is very prevalent. To receive a favor from higher authorities for one’s business, girls, liquor, and money are often offered. Such tactics are used on politicians, police, and government officials to receive various favors. This also creates more demand for young girls in the sex market.

### Human Trafficking and the Legal System in India

Corruption is prevalent in all levels of the government system. Moreover, the Indian government has been accused of failing to recognize the widespread issue of government complicity in trafficking. There is a hierarchy within the corruption system in India. Police, who are charged with upholding the law, are sometimes a part of the corruption. Some police officers believe that brothel prostitution is essential to protect the general public since, as they reason, if prostitution is tolerated, it will decrease the sexual crime rate among the public population. Badly, tolerating the brothels means tolerating sexual abuse of minors, since what goes on inside the brothels is not monitored and frequently involves minors. Again, the result is a creation of an even greater demand for the trafficking of children.

Some police are even aware that children are being sexually abused in the brothels, but they receive large sums of money from the brothels to keep quiet and not act on that knowledge. Many victims of child sex trafficking reportedly were released back to traffickers after brothel raids in New Delhi, Pune, and Mumbai. This was because the police did not follow the proper protocol that calls for them to transfer victims to child welfare committees, which would have placed them with NGOs and other organizations.

It should be noted, however, that though enforcement by police of anti-trafficking laws is still not what it ought to be, our interviews with the victims revealed that several of the women were, in fact, rescued in police raids and turned over to organizations that were in position to provide assistance.

Human trafficking was not an issue in the judicial system or in the political sector five years ago. Now, however, it has captured some attention. There have been laws passed by the government to protect children from exploitation, abuse, and criminal activities; yet, the legal system remains

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30 Hughes and Sporcic.
broken in India. There are various laws that have been enacted to address these issues including the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, the Bonded Labor Abolition Act, the Child Labor Act and the Juvenile Justice Act. Nonetheless, these laws are inadequately enforced by the Indian authorities and few efforts are made to convict, sentence or punish offenders of these laws. Thousands of cases are currently pending in court. Even if a case is brought against a brothel owner, it can take ten years or more before it goes before a judge. By that time, there are often no witnesses or people who are willing to come forward. Often the victim will withdraw the case or the perpetrator by that time has died. Criminals have virtually no fear that they will be punished for their crimes. Most of the children who are trafficked belong to the lowest castes. The conviction rate for those who commit crimes against the lowest castes is less than 1.5%. Sadly, when the police rescue children, they often hand them over to NGOs who don’t possess sufficient resources and staffing to handle the large number of children they receive. There is a serious gap in coordination between the government and NGOs. Victims of bonded labor are entitled to 10,000 rupees from the government for rehabilitation. Children trafficked for forced labor are entitled to 20,000 rupees from the government. This money, however, is generally never paid.

Tragically, the Indian government does not strongly support social services in the country, thus undermining what should be an indispensable network and partner in the country’s efforts to deal with the scourge of sex trafficking.

The Cultural and Religious Context in India

The young victims of sexual trafficking have no choice but to try to make sense of and cope with their horrendous abuse against a backdrop of a set of religious and cultural influences. A plan to help them recover from the degradation of sexual slavery will need to keep in mind what these religious and cultural factors are and the often conflicting messages which they convey.

Often the girls have little or no education, and thus they have simply absorbed from their environment certain tendencies as to how they should view the world, their relationship with their parents and the community, and what is any role they, themselves, have in shaping their own futures. These feelings of shame and anger will sometimes run headlong into religious and cultural messages which in many cases tell them that this is their fate, that they must not speak out, that they are somehow to blame, that they have little or no control of what has and will happen to them. How do they make their way through this morass of contradictory influences and emotions?

Religious faith is prevalent throughout Eastern cultures. India is proud of its heritage and its religious ability for what has happened to her, but on the other hand there is the promise that decisions on one level, this could make it difficult for a trafficking victim not to feel shame or responsibility for what has happened to them and to step boldly into the future as something it might be easier on one level for christians than hindus to encourage victims not to blame others for a hardship will only but result in further punishment.

Though karma is usually associated with hinduism, Buddha affirmed it as well. But what exactly is it? According to the eminent scholar of world religions Huston Smith, karma is basically an affirmation of the “law of cause and effect”. There is something similar in the West in the biblical notion of “As a man sews, so shall he reap,” but as Smith points out, in the East, and in the Indian religious context generally, the notion goes well beyond what the West usually focuses on as causation.

The difference is that India tightens up and extends its concept of moral law to see it as absolute, it breaks no exceptions. The present condition of each interior life— how happy it is, how confused or serene, how much it sees—is an exact product of what it has wanted and done in the past. Equally, its present thoughts and decisions are determining its future experiences. On one level, this could make it difficult for a trafficking victim not to feel shame or responsibility for what has happened to them and to step boldly into the future as something it might be easier on one level for Christians than Hindus to encourage victims not to blame themselves for what has happened to them and to step boldly into the future as something they can shape, there is a way, nevertheless, consistent with a Hindu or Buddhist perspective on karma to do at least the latter.

Karma and Fate

It is not unusual to hear a young woman say that “all my suffering was imposed on my forehead when I was born.” Fate is a common notion within the Indian culture, regardless of religion or caste system. Many people believe that fate is a part of their karma. It is believed in Indian society that one’s actions will determine one’s condition in this life. Every action has its own unavoidable consequence. Bad actions result in bad consequences in their lives. A belief in fate signifies a belief that all things are determined. For some, events in life are thought to be predetermined by the Creator, and thus beyond human control. Such belief in determinism becomes indistinguishable for many from fatalism, and it naturally follows that people are unable to do anything else, and to accept in what, they in fact, do.

Fatalism is prevalent within the caste system, particularly within the lower castes in India. As many in the caste system believe that their situation in life is a result of fate, they believe they can do nothing to change it. Fate in India is equated with bad luck and an unfavorable destiny. Many people believe that when they are born, things that will happen have already been determined. As a result, many people who face difficulties and traumas in their lives do not actively push for change, contending that God’s will or their karma is beyond their control. These concepts of fate often appear in the minds of sex trafficking victims. In India, children often grow up in tight-knit families grounded in a strong religious upbringing. Whether one is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, or Christian, most young victims of the sex trade believe that what they experience is their fate. Throughout India, believing in fate is a culturally acceptable way to make sense of hardship. Victims frequently blame themselves rather than others. Indeed, children are taught that to blame others for a hardship will only but result in further punishment.

37 For a more detailed discussion of many of the religions to be found in India, see Huston Smith’s classic work, 38 Christopher Pattницы, ed., Introduction to World Religions (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 149
42 Smith, p. 65
43 Smith, p. 66
The Place of Children and Women in Indian Society

How the victims of sex trafficking recover from their years of abuse is further complicated by certain cultural factors which in some cases contributed to their being trafficked in the first place. These same factors can also interfere with their recovery following their escape from sexual slavery.

Children are taught to respect and cherish their parents and elders as repositories of the wisdom and knowledge needed to grow and be blessed. It is believed that disobedience and disrespect to parents and elders will result in their lives being cursed. This perspective is taught to children by parents and religious leaders. Questioning parents and elders, including the religious leadership, is generally not allowed in Indian tradition. Even though the culture is changing somewhat in this respect, it is doing so very slowly. As a result, children are frequently not able to express to their parents or other adults what they consider to be right and wrong. Children can become the silent victims of torture, emotional abuse, and sexual exploitation under such circumstances.

Children are taught that their souls are connected to their parents. Children are also a part of their parents’ salvation. Children are expected to keep their pain, problems, emotional scars, and depression to themselves. This is because children fear that if they resist their oppressors, even if their parents are the culprits, they will go against their faith, an action that will bring no good to their lives.

The role of the woman is often well defined within the traditional cultural and religious traditions of India, and by the standards of much of the rest of the world, women are second-class citizens or worse. Women traditionally have been expected to maintain the dignity of the family within the society by fostering a culture of silence. Because of these communal expectations, a feeling of shame is experienced if these lines are crossed. All of the girls who participated in the interview process felt that what happened to them is a part of their fate. Because of this, they are very inclined to feel shame for the rest of their lives. They are ill-equipped to address their feelings of shame and guilt and to step out in confidence along a road to healthy recovery.

There is very little gender equality in India. Women’s empowerment and self-determination are often still more illusion than reality for millions in India. Only the elite, rich, and educated woman can make much, if any, advancement in her life. Many Indian women believe that God’s will is beyond their control and that they can never act freely to advance their lot in life. Most women look to their parents or husbands for guidance and direction in everything. A woman is expected to live and work within her caste system. There is evidence that the situation is beginning to change for women in India, but they still have a long way to go.

Summary

Sexual trafficking in India is the product of a myriad of interlocking economic, social, and cultural factors, made worse by the lax or corrupt government enforcement of anti-trafficking laws.

The ultimate solution must include an attack on the root causes of trafficking, for if this is not done, the number of victims to be rehabilitated will continue to mushroom.

But it is also necessary to deal with the recovery of the victims who now exist. It is a long, slow process, but compassion demands that society not abandon these girls and women—these victims of degrading sexual exploitation.

The Experiences of Sex Trafficking Victims

Though each experience described below is illustrated by recounting the stories of two young girls or women, in fact, each woman’s story would almost certainly involve many of the experiences which are topics of this chapter. Thus, a woman trafficked for sexual exploitation would almost certainly suffer with anger and shame, and have a variety of experiences associated with healing, future-mindedness, forgiveness (very rare), and God, as well.
Madira was raised in a small village in India by a poor, peasant family. She lost her mother when she was very young. Her dad quickly remarried in hopes that his new wife would take care of his children. Unfortunately, Madira’s stepmother was unsupportive and displayed no love towards her new family.

Because of the family’s severe poverty, Madira was forced by her father, at age 13, to go to the big city (Mumbai), where she worked tirelessly for two years. One day, a friend at work told her that if she was willing to go to the Middle East, she could make much more money. Madira decided to pursue this opportunity and contacted the agent whom her friend recommended. The agent told Madira that she would work overseas as a housemaid with a good salary. She was fifteen years old when she reached the Middle East.

When she arrived, Madira was immediately held captive in a windowless room where she never knew whether it was day or night. She soon began to service customers who came to this house of prostitution. Madira’s captivity lasted four years before she was brought back to Mumbai and abandoned in the red light area of Mumbai. In order to survive, Madira began to work as a prostitute at a brothel.

After several years, Madira escaped from the brothel. She soon learned that she was HIV positive. All of her dreams were now shattered—dreams to make money, to escape the poverty of her village, to live a happy life. Madira now lives in a rehabilitation center receiving treatment. She is very depressed and angry.

Madira was angry throughout her captivity. She was angry when she was kept in the dark room with little food, tortured, and her body prostituted for money.
The first day of her captivity through today, she has only experienced betrayal, torture, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Now having a deadly disease, she has lost all hope and hates herself and others. She has lost contact with her siblings. She does not have anyone in the world. Her emotional instability is more than anybody can comprehend. She has tried several times to end her life. She remains extremely angry, especially with herself. She explodes with anger even towards her caretakers. She has difficulty interacting with others as a result of all the torture she has experienced. She feels empty all the time. She represents many other girls who were in the same situation that she was.

Nirma

Nirma was raised in a remote village in a south Indian state. Her parents were very poor. In practicing the devadasi tradition, Nirma’s parents dedicated her to a Hindu goddess called “Yellamma,” which means Good Mother. From an early age, Nirma was trained by her parents and the temple priests in how to perform sexual acts. Nirma’s parents believed that one of their daughters needed to serve the temple in order to bring blessings and moksha (salvation) to the family. By dedicating a child, the family believed they were taking steps to end their poverty.

At the age of seven, Nirma was officially dedicated to the Temple in a celebration. As part of the temple’s daily rituals, the temple priest and other men would often sexually abuse her. Her family was aware of this abuse, but they truly thought these rituals would bring many blessings to the family.

To please the Goddess, Nirma, now 13 years old, and several other temple prostitutes were sent to a brothel in Mumbai. Nirma accepted her fate, showing obedience to her parents and the elders of her temple. She began to earn good money at the brothel, which she immediately sent home to help her parents. This money only reinforced her parents’ belief that the Goddess Yellamma was blessing them. Every six months, Nirma was brought back to the village to pay tribute to the goddess.

Many years passed. Nirma became HIV positive and during her time in the brothel, she gave birth to five children (who were also HIV positive). She soon became the Madam of a brothel. Even though she now had the freedom to leave this life of prostitution, why would she leave? Where else could she go? This was her fate.

Several years ago, a Christian social worker visited Nirma in the brothel. This social worker changed Nirma’s life. Nirma soon decided to leave the brothel and to live in a rescue home, with her children. She is now working to help free young girls who are sold into prostitution. Today, she expresses no anger toward her parents or the temple priests. Her newfound work and changed attitude on life has erased her anger and replaced it with purpose.
KEY FINDINGS

Almost every young woman interviewed for this study expressed strong feelings of anger.

There is ample evidence within the “anti-slavery” literature that all victims of sexual slavery exhibit some form of anger. Moreover, numerous studies, including this one, have documented how the emotion of anger, caused by overwhelming physical and psychological pain, often turns to hostility. Many of the girls interviewed for this study are hostile to everyone around them, including their rescuers. These girls find it difficult to trust anyone, even themselves.

Towards whom did the young women we interviewed express anger?

Many expressed anger toward their parents or relatives, especially those girls whose parents were involved in their abduction (often because of a parent’s desire for money rather than a concern for his or her daughter’s welfare). All the women we interviewed expressed anger toward their abductors. They see their abductors as criminals who should be punished. Several women clearly were angry at their god or the society by which they were defined, and empty. Unlike Nirma, she seems to lack the support system or spiritual grounding to move beyond her anger.

In India, expressions of anger, especially by women, are not socially acceptable. This is something which needs to be addressed if understandable anger is to be given voice in order to further the recovery process.

Due to the social superiority of males within the Indian culture, many of the girls we interviewed have been unable to express publicly their anger due to the fear that they will be labeled as “bad girls” within Indian society. Even in the face of such extreme pain and loss, the majority of the girls we interviewed learned being punished by their parents and male elders if they expressed any degree of anger in a public setting. These girls were concerned that a public expression of anger would stigmatize them (and certainly negatively affect any future marriage prospects). Many of the women we interviewed, including Madira and Nirma, believe that simply because they are women, they have no “voice” to proclaim what is right and wrong. The emotional expression of power and anger are denied to the Indian woman. It is expected that the Indian woman will not only deny these emotions before society but also to herself. Women are expected to protect their identity as “women” in home and society by suppressing their emotions. They must function within a society where males dominate every aspect of life. Even in the workplace, educated women maintain a façade of composure and tranquility when they simmer with anger inside. They are not allowed to show any anger or frustration to their male counterparts. Women who reach the top in their jobs may show their frustration, since it is considered “earned,” but such expressions are not generally sanctioned by the society. Even those successful women who demonstrate their anger publicly will often be labeled as “bad” women who are disgrace to their husbands.

Since women in India have no opportunity to express their frustration and anger openly to the others, this can cause them a great deal of internal stress. Such stress can result in many medical complications in mid-life. The traditional role of a woman in the Indian society is to serve her husband and take care of her family. Public expressions of her emotions are meant to remain personal and internal. The girls in our study learned from their mothers at an early age to suppress their emotions and they struggle now with trying to reconcile these learned patterns with the intense emotions that have been evoked as a result of the horrors of the sex trade.

Girls (like Nirma above) who have found support systems where spirituality is fostered tend to be better able to overcome their negativity and anger than girls who remained alone and less grounded in faith.

Many of girls interviewed for this study have been traumatized and are in need of professional help and support. Too many of the girls we interviewed were “captives” to an overwhelming pessimism that prevents them from determining their own futures. A full 70% of the women we interviewed shared with us that, even after gaining their freedom, they expected to experience serious bouts of what we believe to be clinical depression.

Within this context, religion and spirituality are not by any means a one-stop panacea. We recognize that women who have gained their freedom need much more than a religious or spiritual support system. Our research shows, however, that a religious support system can often help. Nirma still has feelings of anger and fear, but it is clear that her Christian religious beliefs and spiritual practices (such as prayer) are positive factors in her recovery. Madira has spent her time in a rehabilitation center, but she feels alone, abandoned, and empty. Unlike Nirma, she seems to lack the support system or spiritual grounding to move beyond her anger.
Lavali

Born in South India, Lavali was the daughter of poor farmers. Instead of going to school, she helped her parents on the farm and took care of her two younger sisters. One day, Lavali’s parents were approached by a woman from a big city in South India who offered to find Lavali a job as a maid in a wealthy Mumbai household. She promised Lavali’s parents that their daughter would make a good living and be able to send money home. Lavali’s parents were happy for this opportunity and trusted this lady. A few days later, 12-year-old Lavali accompanied this lady to Mumbai. Upon their arrival, Lavali was sold to a brothel house. At first, she did not understand what was taking place. She did not even understand the language spoken around her. The brothel madam was a cruel lady. She introduced Lavali to the other girls at the house and asked them to train her for the business. Lavali was forced to see a customer that first day, even though she was extremely ashamed to lose her virginity to a complete stranger. She begged Madam to have mercy on her. Lavali pleaded to be allowed to do other housecleaning jobs in the brothel instead of servicing the customers. Madam laughed at her suggestion and explained that Lavali needed to service the customers to pay off her debt. On her third night in the brothel, she was bound to a bed and raped by a customer. Thereafter, she was forced to see several customers every day in order to make more money to pay the debt.

Lavali quickly learned not to disobey the madam, for when she did the consequences were severe. She was beaten many times and whenever she did not follow the rules, she was locked in a dark room without food or water.

Lavali was held in slavery for four years. She was rescued during a raid and taken to a government facility where she is now undergoing counseling for her trauma. During our interview, Lavali expressed no hope for the future and remains very angry toward everyone. She
is very depressed and her spirit is broken. She does not wish to see her family again, nor does she want them to know where she is or what she has experienced. It is not that she is angry at her parents—she knows that they were tricked. She simply wants to avoid bringing shame to her family. Lavali is now 17 years old.

**Mahi**

Mahi was born and raised in a poor family in India. She lost her mother when she was very young and her father soon remarried. Mahi’s new stepmother showed no love or kindness to her. A few years later, Mahi’s father passed away and Mahi had no choice but to continue to live with her stepmother and step-brother. Mahi felt extremely lonely in her house, and she hated her life until one of her neighbors, Resma, started paying special attention to her. Resma told Mahi that she could work for her in Mumbai. Mahi was excited about this opportunity and so was her stepmother. Mahi was 13 years old at the time.

Resma told everyone that she owned a gas station in Mumbai, a story that Mahi later learned was a lie. In reality, Resma was a prostitute. Instead of bringing Mahi to Mumbai as planned, Resma took her to the northern Indian state of Gujarat, where they stayed for several months. Resma would leave for work every evening and return early in the morning. At the time, Mahi thought that perhaps Resma was working in a factory. Eventually, she learned that Resma was a prostitute who worked at a brothel house. Resma wanted Mahi to work as a prostitute as well. When she refused, Resma began to abuse her physically and emotionally.

Overnight Resma became an enemy rather than a friend. Mahi was soon forced to work as a prostitute. Resma gave her lessons on how to please the customers. Mahi received no share of the money she earned. She was a slave to Resma.

After one year, Resma sold Mahi to someone from Mumbai. This man already owned 25 other girls. The girls were imprisoned in a house until they were escorted to a hotel to service a customer. As before, Mahi was badly beaten and abused. As before, Mahi received no share of the money for her work.

Mahi was rescued during a police raid and now lives in a government facility. She does not want to return home or see any of her relatives. She feels intense shame for losing her virginity before she married.

Regardless of age, victims who experience the horrors of the sex trade feel ashamed. Their shame is often linked to losing their virginity before marriage.

It has been noted that brothel customers exhibit the highest preference for young girls who are still virgins, due in part to a prevalent myth that having sex with a virgin will prevent the contraction of AIDS. Because of this strong customer preference, as well as the general age and marital status of the victims, many of the girls who are trafficked to the brothels face losing their virginity as the first of many terrors that they must endure. Almost all of the girls who were interviewed for this study were under the age of 21. Forty nine percent of them were between the ages of 13 and 15, and most were unmarried. Thus, the majority of the girls lost their virginity while in captivity.

Sex has always remained a taboo subject of conversation within the Indian context. The Indian culture emphasizes that a girl should be a virgin until she marries. Girls are expected to uphold their family honor by maintaining their sexual purity. Girls who lose their virginity before marriage are made to feel disgraced, unclean, filthy. Girls who lose their virginity before marriage are often called derogatory names like “whore” or “adulteress.” In fact, men maintain a double standard, insisting that their wives should be virgin or pure when they marry but feeling no such obligation regarding their own conduct.

A culture of silence exists that forbids women from outwardly discussing issues involving their sexuality. Women in India also remain very intimidated when they talk to their doctors about their sex lives. As a result, most of the sexual abuse that occurs is never reported. Even young girls, of whom a high percentage experience some type of sexual abuse, are ashamed to speak out about what happens to them. One of the main reasons for their silence is that if they speak out, their parents will blame and punish them. Also, the abuser is often a relative, a father, or a close friend. Speaking out will only cause problems within the family. Finally, it is thought that sexual “disgrace” will plague the whole family for many generations. The children are well aware of these consequences, and they fear the consequences more than they desire help for their own well-being.

A woman who talks about her sexuality, even to her close friends, is considered to be “immoral.” Because of these cultural standards, there is a fear amongst women in India that they will be ostracized if they break these social mores. Girls passionately believe that they must keep their virginity until marriage at any cost. Girls or women rescued from brothels are deeply ashamed about what has happened to them, and they believe they have disgraced themselves and their families by losing this purity. They are now objects of social stigma and derision, and are morally outcast. The majority of the young women we interviewed expressed repeatedly an inescapable and awful truth: They have lost something they valued deeply—their virginity.

**Feelings of shame are frequently linked to a dominant religious belief that it was one’s fate to undergo this experience.**

As was noted in Chapter 2, it is unusual to hear a young woman say that “all my suffering was imparted on my forehead when I was born.” This fatalistic tendency is interconnected with the Indian cultural dominance of men over women. It reinforces the likelihood that a woman will not believe she has much, if any, control over her destiny, and it magnifies her experience of deep, unremitting shame.

The feeling of shame often persists, even after counseling, job training, and re-entry into mainstream society.
Each young woman we interviewed insisted that her experience of shame had become an uneasy companion. They do not want anyone to know what they have experienced. This shame has trapped them in a loneliness that keeps them separated—both emotionally and physically—from others. They prefer to be alone, veiled in their shame. Dr. Sharman Babior, lecturer at the UCLA anthropology department, discusses the concept of shame in the Eastern context:

If an individual would come forward and admit that there was a problem, it doesn’t limit itself to that individual, but it extends to all family members and brings shame upon all family. So it is seen as being much more desirable just to kind of grit your teeth and bear your problems rather than bring shame upon yourself and your family, which is not erasable. You do not get rid of the shame. It can persist beyond your generation. It can spill to your children’s generation.\(^\text{35}\)

For these girls and women, the experience of shame becomes a life-long burden of guilt.

People view the victims of sex trafficking as simply prostitutes, even though the fact that they were in slavery was not their choice. This is one of the main reasons these girls do not want to return to their hometown, as it would only bring shame to their entire family, resulting in a labeling of their family as connected with prostitution for generations to come. This is a fearful thought. They see their lives as dark and without any prospects. For these reasons, many victims prefer isolation, perhaps seeking some comfort in viewing their situation as a product of fate.

Children who are sexually abused will go through emotional symptoms like guilt, shame, feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem, anxiety, hostile, aggressive behavior, and problems in their future lives.\(^\text{35}\) All of the girls in our study who received counseling and job training and re-entered the mainstream reported that still they feel shame about what happened in their lives. They do not want anybody to know about it, including their parents and relatives. These girls have guilt, low self-esteem, and a lack of confidence. Not surprisingly, they often possess little or no courage to face new challenges and view all obstacles with great fear and anxiety. Since they are not able to emerge from the shame, they become moody, and are almost certain to keep their anger and disappointments locked deep inside.


\(^{36}\text{Judith Lewis Herman, Father-daughter Incest, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 30.}\)
Husna was born into a poor family in North India. Husna had to work very hard to make a living even when she was very young. Husna always dreamed of being free from poverty, having a better life, and getting married. Unfortunately, there was no money to accomplish these dreams.

One day, a lady whom her family knew came to Husna’s village and told her about a good opportunity in Mumbai. She offered Husna a job there. She also assured her that she could help her family with her salary.

Husna came to Mumbai with high hopes. For a few days, Husna stayed with the lady and went sightseeing in the big city. Then one day, the lady took Husna to the red light area. Husna did not know anything about the brothels in Mumbai. She simply thought that the building where she was taken to was the place where she would get a job. Instead, the lady sold Husna for a huge amount of money and then just left her there.

The brothel madam explained where she was and what she was supposed to do. The girls in the brothel were instructed to give her training on how to please a man. She refused to do it. As punishment, they began to beat her badly and burn her body with cigarettes. Husna was isolated in a dark room without food and water. Finally, she was bound to the bed and raped by a customer. This began her suffering. Husna spent twelve years inside the darkness paying off her “debt.” She never saw the sun.

She finally found freedom one day when a staff member from a local social organization met her and heard her story. After this meeting, she was rescued within days. Her twelve years in captivity made her sick and weak. Husna has AIDS and tuberculosis. She is a very angry woman and suffers from depression. She does not know what happened to her family and feels alone in the world.
Brinda was born into a middle-class family in India. Her parents died when she was very young, so she was raised by a relative. With no parents to finance her education, Brinda was unable to go to school. She spent most of her time with a close girlfriend in her village. This girl introduced Brinda to another friend who told Brinda that she could find a good job in another city and with this salary could create a better life for herself. Brinda trusted him because of his connection with her close girlfriend.

Brinda wanted to one day get married and knew that she needed to have considerable money in order to do this. Without her parents, there was no one in her life to initiate the marriage process. Brinda realized that her future looked bleak.

So Brinda took the advice of this man and, at 17 years old, left with him in search of a new life. On their way to the city, the man gave Brinda something to drink on the train which made her unconscious. She later learned that he had drugged her with sleeping pills. While she was unconscious, the man brought her to a brothel in Mumbai and sold her. When she regained her consciousness, she realized that she was in a strange place. The man who was traveling with her had disappeared. She was afraid and asked the people around her where she was. They told her that she was in Mumbai and had been sold by that man into sexual slavery. Brinda was shocked and terribly frightened.

She had no way to escape from the bondage. The brothel madam told her that she had to earn customers and make money for her. When Brinda refused to do it, the madam became so angry with her that she hit her. The brothel people beat her, burned her body with hot water, and kept her in a dark room without food and drink. Her pain was severe. On one occasion, the brothel madam and her men tied her into the bed and asked the customers to rape her repeatedly. Finally, Brinda knew that she had no choice but to submit and adapt to the life and the work of the brothel.

For seven years Brinda was a slave. She had no contact with the outside world. She became physically ill and suffered severe bodily pain. Finally one day, a social organization was able to make contact with Brinda. The organization’s staff heard her cries and suffering. They said they would rescue her. They were able to help her finally escape the brothel. After her rescue, Brinda was extremely depressed and physically very weak. The slavery and torture she experienced made her angry at herself and others. She felt completely broken and wounded spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The organization ministered to her in all aspects of her healing. It took many years for her to begin to make a recovery. Finally, she began to trust in God. She was able to do so because of the optimism and hope that the organization was able to bring to her. Brinda has received counseling and other training in the social organization. She now works as part of the staff in this organization to counsel other girls who are rescued from the brothel. Even though Brinda often still experiences emotional pain, her faith in God, the support system she is now a part of, and the opportunity she now has to help others, allows her to continue the healing process. Her healing is gradual but also promising.
The overwhelming majority of the young women we interviewed experienced severe physical abuse during their captivity and now suffer from a variety of physical ailments.

It is difficult not to notice the bodies of the 100 women we interviewed. These women are terribly thin and their bodies are extremely fragile and weak. This is often the result of severe malnutrition during their time in sexual slavery.52 In this environment, they were forced to see a minimum of seven customers and sometimes as many as ten customers per day. They were required to meet the customers and negotiate a deal that would help them to pay off their “debt” to the brothel owner. They were forced to work day and night and sometimes stand for many hours at a time waiting for the customers. During their slavery, they barely ate anything, the food they were given.

Not surprisingly, the victims often experience extreme bitterness, something which makes healing both necessary and extremely difficult to achieve.

Sex trafficking victims are abused by beatings, torture, and starvation, and are raped into submission. This common thread of physical cruelty is woven through all the girls’ stories of their time in sexual slavery.53 The girls are forced into debt bondage where they are made to feel that they “owe” their captors a great deal of money; there appears to be no end to how much they owe.54 An environment of terror is fostered. Fearing for their lives, the girls have no alternative but to do what they are told.

The right combination of opportunity, association with a support system, and a positive environment can give them a new chance at life.

After rescue, these girls are sick in body, mind, and spirit. Sex trafficking victims are subject to a host of health risks, including addiction to drugs and alcohol, broken bones, bruises, burns, traumatic brain injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, infertility, miscarriages, maternal problems, and other diseases including malaria and pneumonia.55 Almost half of our study group said they suffered from body pain and 43% experience physical weakness. Others in the group suffer from severe coughs or other respiratory issues, diabetes, stomach or abdominal pain, headaches, and migraines. Due to the nature of the work, they were forced to perform in the brothel, many of them have very curved, bony feet. After their rescue, many of the girls simply lose interest in taking care of their bodies entirely. They hate themselves. They worry that they have lost their beauty. They look much older than their years. As a result, most of them report that they have no appetite or desire to eat. Eating disorders are prevalent in the brothel, and they remain with the girls even after they are rescued. For most of these women, their current physical ailments will almost certainly remain with them for the rest of their lives.

The major findings reported in this chapter are:

A large percentage of the young women we interviewed have contracted HIV, tuberculosis or a STI.56 A variety of factors common to brothel life can add to the victims’ susceptibility to these diseases. First, the girls are commonly forced to have unprotected sex with their customers.57 Brothel owners allow this practice because customers will pay more money when they do not have to use a condom. Second, the girls’ exposure to numerous sexual partners coupled with a lack of protection renders them more vulnerable to physical ailments. In addition, many of the girls are forced to work in more than one brothel, further increasing their risk of infection.58 Finally, being forced to have sex with customers against their will creates an environment where the girls are subjected to physical violence. “Injuries and abrasions sustained during sexual contact heighten physical vulnerability to AIDS transmission.” And young girls’ forced sexual bonding makes them more vulnerable to serious harm that may be highly vulnerable to physical violence. Due to their exposure to unprotected sex, multiple sexual partners, and physical violence, the majority of these victims will inevitably contract a sexually transmitted disease.

Furthermore, many of these girls will not receive the medical attention they require due to the longstanding biases against them as women and as former sex workers.59 For they are left to suffer internally. They have no medical or emotional support for their ailments.

Not only are the victims of sex trafficking forces to make financial payments, but they are also subjected to sexual exploitation in the form of forced prostitution, or “Debt Bondage.” 60

The overwhelming majority of the young women we interviewed suffer from some type of emotional trauma, including depression, nightmares, anxiety, fear, and lack of motivation. For most of the girls, the emotional trauma is more damaging or difficult to treat than the physical condition. There is often no outlet for sharing their pain. Typically, they find it impossible to trust anyone. Many times they will not share their emotional pain even with the NGO staffs that take care of them. Most of the doctors available to them are male. These girls particularly find it difficult to open up to male doctors regarding their emotional and physical conditions. The lack of enough female psychologists and doctors is a serious problem.

The majority of the young women we interviewed expressed a desire to continue living in a home with other women who have been rescued from the sex trade. Many of the girls who have been rescued prefer to remain in the group homes in which they have been released from the brothels. They believe they have found a “new family,” forged out of a common identity. They find comfort in these groups for many reasons. First, they face difficulty reintegrating into mainstream society. They fear that if the public discovers their identity as former prostitutes that they will be denied social acceptance. Secondly, they have nowhere to go and be productive. Many girls are unable or unwilling to return home after their rescues and feel that they have no opportunities or future. Thirdly, it seems that the girls in these homes lack any sense of self-determination. The NGOs that have rescued these women are providing them with a safe place to live, but, in many cases, are unable to instill a will power within them to move forward and seek independence. The NGOs created by the NGOs can take the form of overprotection including a restriction of some freedoms. It is not an easy balance for the
NGOs to find between much-needed protection and the need for the women to become more independent. The majority of the girls would like to be independent but need to find an appropriate avenue for them to develop, grow, and prosper.

There is little attention given to the importance of spiritual healing as part of a young woman’s recovery.

The secular nature of the Indian government and the majority of the Indian NGOs that rescue them make the spiritual and emotional healing of these girls less of a priority than their physical healing. The majority of these girls were raised in families where there was at least some spiritual sense. Then the sexual slavery that they were subjected to brought spiritual harm into their lives. When they were forced to enter into sexual slavery, their belief systems were violated. They believed that they were sinning before their God or gods. This was true for all of the girls, regardless of their religious backgrounds. The only exception to this is the temple prostitutes who are made to believe that it is God’s will that they be prostitutes. In sexual slavery, their relationships with their God or gods has often been broken in terms of their ability to love, trust, and be pure.68 During sexual slavery, they lost their spiritual connections and vitality due to the guilt that made them feel that they are sinners and wrongdoers. There was nothing in brothel life to maintain their faith. Quite the contrary. Many of these girls, after they leave the brothel, search for spiritual restoration, along with emotional and physical healing. Because these three types of healing are intertwined, their healing remains incomplete when they receive only physical help. Those that do receive spiritual help and healing do much better than their counterparts who do not.69

Many young women do not receive the necessary medical and psychological attention they need due to the scarcity of doctors and facilities relative to the size of the population.

India is facing a medical crisis due to overpopulation and inadequate availability of medical facilities and doctors. According to the World Health Organization, there are only nine beds for every 10,000 people. There are seven doctors and eight nurses for every 10,000 people. People have to wait many hours to get a few minutes with a doctor. All these girls need help from the NGOs to see a doctor. Often it is difficult or impossible to get the individual attention required. Moreover, during the interview process, it became evident that NGOs are ill-equipped to facilitate the full medical and psychological recovery of these victims. Those who work at these NGOs are certainly willing to help, but are not always properly trained in counseling and psychological treatment.


69 Interview with Dr. Prashant Saravade, M.M.B.S. Medical Officer, Bombay Teen Challenge, January 8, 2008.

Etka has no dreams for her future. After being rescued from six years of bondage, she is physically weak and HIV positive. A cloud of pessimism engulfs her, and she trusts no one. But she was not always like this.

Etka grew up in a small village in northern India in a poor family. With no chance of education but high hopes as a young 13-year-old woman, she quickly agreed to pursue her aunt’s suggestion of making a decent living as a housecleaner in Mumbai. With her parents’ support and encouragement, she embarked on a long journey to the big city, filled with new experiences and sights. Little did she know that this train ride was, in reality, a journey to slavery.

During one of her first nights in Mumbai, she was taken to a house where she was served a “good meal.” After the meal, she expected her aunt to return, but instead she was taken to what would be for her a living nightmare—a brothel house. Etka thought her aunt would come and rescue her. She didn’t know what was going on there. She saw many young girls in that house who were all well-dressed and adorned with makeup. Seeing them encouraged her. Etka thought it would be a good place to make many friends. At the time, she had no idea that they were sex slaves making money for the brothel owner. Etka was not permitted to talk to them when she arrived. That evening, Madam told her that she was in a brothel and explained what she was expected to do. Madam told her that her aunt had sold her for a huge amount and a debt was now owed that she had the responsibility to pay back. Etka could not believe what she was hearing. She came to Mumbai with great dreams and for a bright future.

At the beginning, she refused to see the customers. The result was very severe. She was beaten, burned, and tortured in a dark bunker cell until she finally submitted to her new life as a sex slave.
her new life as a sex slave. The following night a customer raped her. It was more than a 13-year-old could handle. She had no escape. She existed in this cage for six years.

Six years later, she recounted her rape, physical and emotional abuse, and the isolation she felt during that time. Etka does not think about the future, and she has no aspirations. Her self-esteem is shattered, and she remains depressed and fearful. She sees death as the solution to pain, hate, and her misery. She has lost faith in God. She believes that God abandoned her in the time of her difficulty. Her anger against God is real. She can only change her belief when she sees some positive things are happening in her life.

Mercy

Mercy has always been a fighter. As a young girl, she made a rash decision to leave her home, in search of freedom. She did not realize that there were people in the world waiting to mislead her and take her freedom.

Finding herself in the bondage of the brothels, she was abused physically and emotionally. From the beginning of her slavery, however, Mercy mentally prepared herself to escape as soon as she could, and one day an opportunity presented itself. After hiding herself for several months, she eventually found safety at a social organization. She was determined to build her skills so she could find work in the city.

The social organization sent Mercy to the hospitality service agency. Mercy immediately displayed her enthusiasm for the work, and her instructor recognized her potential. Today, Mercy serves as an instructor to young girls and women who want to work as housekeepers. She regularly trains about 10-15 people at a time. Mercy shares her enthusiasm with her students, and she tries her best to instill in them how important it is to have hopes and dreams. With a monthly salary of Rs.6000 ($135), Mercy is able to support her mother and has recently enrolled her 5-year-old son in a school nearby.

Despite her wretched past experiences, she has been able to transcend the misfortunes and focus on her future. She still has a life to live, and this keeps her going.

Ashley

Ashley was a good student in school but very shy and timid. This vulnerability was recognized by one of her relatives who was able to easily deceive her by one of the typical “tricks” used by recruiters. Ashley was sold to the brothels. She was a slave for a few years in the sex trade until she was eventually rescued by the police.

Due to her slavery and torture, Ashley was very depressed. She had trouble facing people and feared most social encounters. The government transferred her to a social organization, where they gave her counseling and other medical care.
Through constant counseling and group motivation activities, the staff at the social organization was successful in helping her to build confidence in her life. This self-assurance helped quell her fears and develop a more comfortable feeling when dealing with others. She began to interact with people again and maintain relationships.

Ashley now remains in another shelter. This is an open home where girls are able to enter and leave freely, unlike the closed homes of the government. Ashley re-enrolled in the 10th grade at the National Open School. The literacy trainer at the social organization helped tutor her in her schoolwork. She realized that she had a knack for computers. She began with a two-week course in computers from another local institute and then desired to pursue this training further. The social organization identified one of the premium training institutes within the city and sent her for a short workshop in graphic design. She demonstrated strong commitment and was praised by her instructors.

She is now enrolled in an eight-month course which will train her to be a graphic designer. After this training, she will have a guaranteed job within the field with a minimum salary of Rs. 6000 ($135) to Rs.8000 ($178). When interviewed, Ashley was three months into the course and showed great potential.

Leaving the trauma behind and striding confidently into a new future was not easy for Ashley. Having been rescued from the sex trade, she needed intense counseling and care to overcome the past. With time, however, Ashley has learned to overcome her problems. She has determination to succeed in her life despite all the odds.

KEY FINDINGS

Why was I born this way? Why has this happened to me? Why didn’t I get the life I dreamed of? Why has everyone failed me, including God? Why do I feel pain and no joy? What did I do wrong? Battered, emotionally torn, ashamed, isolated, robbed of innocence—girls and women rescued from the sex trade in India struggle to understand their past, survive their present, and chart their future.

There is strong evidence that social organizations have helped women rescued from the brothels rebuild their lives—offering hope and a vision of a better future.

Many of the women we interviewed were fortunate to find circumstances and opportunities through a social organization, where they were able to build their sense of hope. For these girls, their hope was nurtured by people at these social organizations who freely talked about their own hopes and future-mindedness. But it should also be recognized, that for reasons we do not fully understand, some girls and women simply seem to possess an unusual ability to cope and fight through to a better life. This often mysterious inner resolve to have hope and never give up is critically important.

Why do i only feel pain and no joy? What did i do wrong? Battered, emotionally torn, ashamed, isolated, robbed of innocence—girls and women rescued from the sex trade in India struggle to understand their past, survive their present, and chart their future.

Self-determination is a key predictor of future-mindedness. Victims who have this resolve to an unusual degree need as much as possible to be used in facilitating the recovery of other victims.

During our interviews, it was evident that many of the rescued girls preferred to remain in the group homes or social organizations they moved into after they escaped the brothels. Within these homes, they have developed a sense of security and comfort that is enhanced by a feeling of commonality that they share with other girls who have endured similar past experiences. These environments create a kind of new family for these girls which make them feel safe. However, this type of atmosphere can also limit their ability to move forward if encouragement to become independent is not fostered.

When faced with a choice between reintegration into a society that may reject them and remaining in the safety net of the group home, many of the girls select the latter. This choice is understandable, but it sometimes prevents or slows their progress towards self-determination. Without such independence, it is difficult for them to cultivate desired independence and future-mindedness. A balance must be found and maintained in their rescued environments that allow the girls to feel safe but also to develop the tools necessary to reintegrate into society. Their caretakers need to understand their vulnerabilities and help them find supportive social networks for them to find security.

In most cases, those girls who possess a sense of future-mindedness have been encouraged by their rescuers to develop the skills needed to build their own futures. Several of the girls we interviewed now work at the social organizations that rescued them or are involved in social advocacy work in order to help other girls who are held captive in the world of sex trafficking. In addition, almost a quarter of the girls in our study said that they dreamed of helping others who work in the brothel. These dreams are fostered by their own sense of self-empowerment which they have developed during their recovery. By cultivating their own self-determination, they are able to develop a purpose to help others who are facing similar situations. “In the best of all worlds, survivors will have opportunities to become grassroots organizers as well as service providers themselves.”

A telling example of the girls’ desire to improve someone else’s life was expressed in an aspiration that was a common response to our survey questions. Several of the girls in this study expressed a desire to one day becoming beauticians. Such an aspiration may seem unusual to some, but it stems from their broken spirits. After what they have been through, most of the girls no longer think of themselves as attractive. They possess minimal self-esteem and are full of shame. They instead look to the beauty of other people. This future-minded outlook to become beauticians lends itself well to the healing process. The girls view the job not simply as a trade, but also as a part of their healing. Since they feel

Table: Girls’ Dreams for the Future

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no self-beauty, they desire to make other people beautiful instead. With the dream of becoming beauticians, these girls aspire to help others be that which they think themselves can no longer be—beautiful.

Belief in a divinity or God is a key predictor of future-mindedness.

To many of these girls, hope is a gift that comes from God. Among the one hundred girls we interviewed, 86% of the interviewees expressed a belief in God. Sixty-four percent of these girls expressed optimism and hope in their future. They connect hope with their belief in God and experience it on a daily basis.

Many of the victims can only see hope in relation to their liberty, equality, and worth.

Too often, rescued victims remain suffocated by old traditions and systems, stereotypes and gender biases, and they have difficulty seeing their futures in a hopeful, positive manner. They remain stuck in the past, marked by the stigma that their involuntary sex work has branded on them. For Mercy, Ashley, and other girls who can move beyond the past, they have found constructive environments within the social organizations where they can focus on what is next. For these girls, hope was something that was nurtured by people with hope.

The age of the victim often influences her ability to maintain a positive outlook on the future.

Finding optimism and contemplating the future remain troublesome tasks for these young survivors. Many suffer from low self-esteem and find themselves falling into a downward spiral of depression and despondency. Older girls tend to be the most skeptical. Only a small percentage of women in this group believe that their lives are still worth living or that there might still be a chance to be productive. Discouragement and disappointment dominate. They have developed rigid habits of thought which remain unchanged until positive experiences take place and give birth to a more optimistic outlook. Conversely, younger survivors, especially those who are not HIV positive, tend to be more optimistic about their futures. Their future-mindedness is stronger and they possess a greater confidence level than their elder counterparts. They tightly cling to whatever hope or ambition might help them through their recovery—whether it be to live for their children, get back on their own feet, or to find a job.
Suni was born in Nepal and raised by a very poor family. With no school in her village, Suni was unable to receive an education. She and three girlfriends, all twelve-year-olds, used to go into the forest everyday to collect dry sticks for cooking food. On one of these occasions, Suni and her friends met a stranger there. This man told them that he was a businessman and could offer all of them a good job in a leather company in another town. Excited by this prospect, the following day, the girls left home with this man in hopes of finding a job that would take care of their families. Upon their arrival in the new town, the businessman gave them some food. Shortly after consumption, they were all unconscious. After two days, they awoke to discover that they were in India. Suni and her friends could only communicate in the Nepali language. The stranger who had brought them into India had disappeared. They were forced to board a train to an unknown location and were ordered by another man not to make a sound.

After two days, they reached Bombay, where they were taken to a house and sold to a brothel madam. They saw many other girls in this house, but did not understand what was going on there. After dinner, madam explained to them where they were and what was expected of them. Suni could not believe what she was hearing. As a 12-year-old girl who had left everything to overcome starvation and poverty, she had ended up in a brothel. She was terrified and began to cry. She refused to perform sexual acts with men, but the madam forced her to comply. The consequences of disobedience to the madam were severe. The madam’s men would torture Suni by placing hot iron rods on her body and burning her, pouring hot water on her face, severely beating her, and subjecting her to verbal and physical abuse. Suni and her friends were eventually separated. She was horrified by all of the persecution she faced. One night, a customer raped her. She was groaning with pain. But there was nobody to sympathize with the agony of a 12-year-old girl. Suni now understood that she was a slave. She could only see closed and locked doors everywhere.

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Chapter 2 - The Experiences of Sex Trafficking Victims
Eshani came to know that Suni was a good dancer. Suni was taken to bars and nightclubs and forced to dance so that the brothel madam could make more money. As a young prostitute and nightclub dancer, she was forced to drink alcohol and consume drugs. She had no escape. Since she was from Nepal and had no passport, she was unable to return to her home.

Unexpectedly, this young man brought her to the Delhi red light district, sold her to a particularly cruel owner, and abandoned her. Eshani had just turned 13 at that time. Before this, she was totally ignorant of what life in a brothel was like. When she arrived, Eshani saw a few girls her age in that house, all well-dressed and adorned with makeup. One of the girls took Eshani under her wing and brought her into the house and explained what was required of her. Eshani was shocked by this revelation and began to cry. Madam called Eshani to her room and began to scold her. Madam was an angry woman. She explained that the man had sold Eshani to her and now madam could make more money. As a young prostitute and nightclub dancer, she was forced to drink alcohol and consume drugs. Eshani was completely ignorant of what life in a brothel was like. When she arrived, she was completely ignorant of what life in a brothel was like. When she arrived, Eshani refused to see the customers. She was punished for this defiance and began to cry. Madam came to know that Suni was a good dancer. Suni was taken to bars and nightclubs and forced to dance so that the brothel madam could make more money. As a young prostitute and nightclub dancer, she was forced to drink alcohol and consume drugs. She had no escape. Since she was from Nepal and had no passport, she was unable to return to her home.

Eshani had finally escaped. Currently, Eshani is with a social organization. She receives vocational training in sewing there. She is now 17 and suffers from a STD. She receives vocational training in sewing there. She is now 17 and suffers from a STD.

Eshani was born into a poor family in South India. As a young child, she was very rebellious and was punished often by her father for her disobedience. She was not gifted in school and only finished the 5th grade. Because of the poverty and problems in the house, at age 12, Eshani ran away from home.

She met a young man who told her that he could find her a good housekeeping job in Delhi. So late one evening, Eshani ran away with this man to Delhi. Eshani was seeking freedom and happiness. This is not what she found.

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Eshani was very rebellious and was punished often by her father for her disobedience. She was not gifted in school and only finished the 5th grade. Because of the poverty and problems in the house, at age 12, Eshani ran away from home.

She met a young man who told her that he could find her a good housekeeping job in Delhi. So late one evening, Eshani ran away with this man to Delhi. Eshani was seeking freedom and happiness. This is not what she found.

In Delhi, Eshani was taken to bars and nightclubs and forced to dance so that the brothel madam could make more money. As a young prostitute and nightclub dancer, she was forced to drink alcohol and consume drugs. She had no escape. Since she was from Nepal and had no passport, she was unable to return to her home.

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Eshani has a desire to forgive all who did wrong to her.
To be sure, this implies that the emotions from within counter an acceptance that what they have experienced is simply their deserved karma. Feelings of revenge often boil within them when they recall the horrors that they had to endure while in the clutches of these individuals. “Vengeance is also the wellspring of a notion of equivalence that animates justice. Revenge propels them to find satisfaction, matching like for like, giving what’s coming to the wrongdoer, equalizing crime and punishment, an eye for an eye, each of these synonyms for revenge implies that they recall the horrors that they had to endure while in the clutches of these individuals.”86 Yet, the girls very rarely see these individuals punished by the government, by society, by their religion, or by their families, and therefore, it is difficult for them to forgive even their abusers.87 According to the U.S. Consulate in Kolkata, India, state governments in India have often “failed to punish traffickers,” continued to “ignore the persistence sex traffickers.”88

Only a small percentage of the girls in our study report that they could forgive their abusers. Over half felt that they could forgive themselves and their parents, but only 18% could offer that same forgiveness towards their abusers.89 They feel that their abusers have caused them. “Vengeance and forgiveness are marks along the spiritual hierarchy of the girls’ lives towards atonement. Yet they stand in opposition: to forgive is to let go of vengeance, to avenge is to resist forgiving.”90 Whether punishment is a necessary pre-condition for forgiveness is a matter of dispute; some would argue that forgiveness should not be shackled in this way. These are delicate and complicated matters, and those who deal with them must learn to find some way to help victims escape the burdens of their anger and resentment, regardless of what the perpetrators of the violence do or don’t do in terms of owning up to their role in the abuse.

Forgiveness is often related to one’s religious orientation, including the Hindu belief in karma.

In the Eastern perspective, forgiveness is related to karma, so it is important that we consider the impact of this belief on the victim’s ability to regain self-respect and deal with the complicated and difficult notion of forgiveness. Karma has to do with cause and effect, as one of the natural laws of the universe. This belief is to be found in all the major religions in India. According to the theory of karma, a person’s choices in the past are the main cause of the present situation, whether good or bad. Bad things in the present are viewed as the natural consequence of failures in past lives. These beliefs can represent a serious impediment to victims of trafficking sorting through justifiable anger towards those who have abused and enslaved them, and often block an appropriate consideration of what true forgiveness can and should entail.

One’s fate, one’s karma, is connected with past sins and actions. Free will, on the contrary, if exercised, can influence one’s choices in the future. Therefore, individuals may want to believe that they have some control over what happens to them. A person reaps what he has sown in the past and this action has determined his present. Conceptually, this promotes the idea that we are bound by our past because the way we act today is determined by the predetermined life for every individual through the moral law of karma.91 It should be noted that through free will, a person can create and transform his or her karma. Christianity and one reading of Hindu karma teaching can affirm an important role in life for free will. But for so many in the Indian context, karma is inextricably tied to determination, a theory that is corrosive to any robust exercise of self-determination. As a result, people feel, experience tragedy, and are unable to succeed in their education, finances, or social spheres, they often succumb to the view that it is simply the way God has determined their lives to be. This fatalism must be challenged, but there is a way to do so within the Hindu notion of karma as historian Huston Smith pointed out in Chapter 1. Our present actions, after all, which we have some control over according to karma, will shape our future. This is the point which must be emphasized with trafficking victims.

However, because of the Indian tendency to believe in fatalism and karma, the girls who were forced into sexual slavery often find themselves imprisoned in a narrow understanding of karma as “their fate.” To most of them, free will and the ability to take control of their own lives remains merely an illusion. They believe that this is the way God set things up through karma, and they don’t believe they can change this predetermined path. As a result, the dreams of these girls stay limited and their advancement is impeded by this delimiting religious belief system of determinism. This problem lies at the heart of efforts to help empower victims of trafficking to recover, and is a central finding of our study.

Victims in our study between the ages of 14-20 seemed to accept the importance of forgiveness more than those between the ages of 21-40. Younger girls are more ready to forgive themselves and their parents than older ones. They believe that they have more years ahead of them to consider the impact of their lives, and experience some sort of happiness. This mentality helps them to forgive more easily than their older counterparts. They also believe that since they lack or lack control over their situation earlier, it is better to forgive themselves and move on with their lives.

Young people in India depend on their parents for help and support to create a meaningful life and change their direction, growth, and sustainability. This often makes them better prepared to forgive others and themselves than the older people. The younger generation is also seeking change and development from the environment in which their parents lived. The depravity and poverty that remain prevalent in their society have prompted younger generations to look ahead and dream for their future. Due to a limited understanding of forgiveness, they may not necessarily be able to forgive fully, and may instead seek an understandable escape into trying to forget the bitter experiences of their past. This is a hard, often impossible, task. It is possible for the younger group to forgive more quickly if they can experience some success, joy or assurance and see some hope in their lives.

As the victims get older, this study shows that they have a harder and harder time offering forgiveness. This group has more difficulty trusting others and adjusting to new situations. They are more bitter about their past and their pain lingers longer than it does for the younger ones. They feel future more intensely than their younger counterparts. This feeling of failure makes it more difficult to forgive others who are, in fact, responsible for their plight. They see their future as shorter and less promising. This group sees forgiveness in the context of restitution and payback for their losses. They cannot see forgiveness in any other terms. So they cling to their fate and refuse to try anything that might change their lives. As a result, they have a hard time getting along with others. The victims tend to perceive everything skeptically, with a suspicious eye. Due to their oppressive social environments and lack of hope, they are unable to make progress.

Finally, the belief in karma further confuses the situation and undermines recovery by shifting blame to victims for things that are not their fault. Karma is a concept that is corrosive to any robust exercise of self-determination. As a result, the dreams of these girls stay limited and their advancement is impeded by this delimiting religious belief system of determinism. This problem lies at the heart of efforts to help empower victims of trafficking to recover, and is a central finding of our study.

Forgiveness appears to be related to age. Younger women (14-20) were more willing to talk about forgiveness than women ages 21-40.
Ramani was one of seven children in her family. Living in extreme poverty, Ramani and her family had only a small hut with a roof which would constantly leak on rainy days. Her parents and the elder children worked night and day to make a living on their small agricultural plot. Her father borrowed money to farm, hoping that the next season would bring good crops so that he could pay off the debt. Unfortunately, every season brought another drought. The farming continued to be a great loss for the family. Her father borrowed money from moneylenders with a high interest rate, and the debt continued to pile up as her family fell deeper and deeper into poverty. There was no money for anything, even the basic necessities of life. Ramani and the other children each had only one set of clothes which was battered and torn. Ramani’s parents did not know what to do. They prayed to their God everyday for blessings and for rain, but nothing changed their situation.

Everyone around them saw the poverty and suffering of Ramani’s family. One day, a relative from the neighboring village paid a visit to their house to offer some help. He proposed a new way to get rid of the debt and poverty—by convincing her father to sell Ramani for Rs 50,000 (about $1,316) to him. He would find a good job for her in Bombay city. This was a huge amount of money for the farmer and his family and would take care of the family’s debt and the family’s immediate needs. However, at first, Ramani’s father and mother were very reluctant to sell their own daughter just like a cow in the market. But, the moneylenders began to threaten her father, and it was clear that his life was in danger. He considered his situation and the future of all of his other children. Finally, he gave in and made the difficult choice to sell his eldest daughter to his relative.

Ramani was unaware of the details of the deal until she reached a brothel home in Bombay. It is not clear whether her parents knew that she was being sold into prostitution. Nonetheless, they must have known that when they sold her they would never see her again. Ramani was an innocent 13-year-old girl who had never before been out of her village. She was very frightened and horrified by what she witnessed and by what she would soon experience. She saw many other young
Trust

Trust No one trusts god &

34%

some people

Moreover, there was a lot of fighting that took place between her parents. Her mother left her father when Suma was eight years old. Because of her mother’s departure, Suma assumed the family responsibilities. She had to cook, clean, take care of the cattle, and buy the groceries, along with a long list of other chores. There was no love and care in her house. She used to pray to God every day for more money, love, and a good life. She wanted to be like other children who were loved by others. She was so scared of her father because of the physical abuse she experienced in her childhood.

Suma

Suma is originally from a remote village in North India. Like the other girls, she was born into a poor family. Poverty and suffering consumed her household. Moreover, there was a lot of fighting that took place between her parents. Her mother left her father when Suma was eight years old. Because of her mother’s departure, Suma assumed the family responsibilities. She had to cook, clean, take care of the cattle, and buy the groceries, along with a long list of other chores. There was no love and care in her house. She used to pray to God every day for more money, love, and a good life. She wanted to be like other children who were loved by others. She was so scared of her father because of the physical abuse she experienced in her childhood.

One day before her father went for work, he gave her some money to buy groceries from the local shop. As a child, Suma always had the curiosity to watch a movie but never got a chance to see one. She never had been in a city or in a developed place. She learned from her friends that there were movie theaters. So without knowing the consequences, Suma succumbed to her youthful ambitions and took the money her father had given her and went to see a movie in a local theater. She spent all her money there. She was very afraid to return home, because she would face severe punishment from her father due to her actions. She hid in the bush for a long period of time until nighttime came and she went home to hide inside their small house. Her brother and her father began to search for Suma and finally found her in the house. Suma’s father was furious. He began to scold and beat her. The pain was so severe, more than any eight-year-old should have to endure.

That night, she ran away from the house. Her uncle lived in the next village, so she headed to his house. Her uncle hid her in his house. Suma’s father did not know where she was. Her father made a complaint to the local police. The police searched many places, including her uncle’s home. The police found Suma there and began to beat her uncle. While the police were beating him, she ran away with some money. She took a bus and reached a town by the railway station. She jumped on the first train with no ticket. She had to escape. She had no idea where the train was taking her, but it did not matter. She was so tired, but there was no place to sleep. As her eyes became heavy, she drifted to sleep on the floor of the train. The next morning, the train arrived at its last stop. Suma awoke to find that every passenger was disembarking there. So she, too, joined the group, even though she had no idea where she was. She sat on the floor of the railway station and began to cry.

Later, Suma discovered that she was at the main railway station in Calcutta. That day, she met some street children and some people gave her something to eat. She was hungry and tired. She did not understand the language that the people there spoke. A lot of people were coming and going. She was terrified to know that night was soon coming and once again she would have to sleep in the railway station. She began to cry. A woman approached her and began to talk to her. Suma told her story about how she ended up there. This woman took her, comforted her and assured that she would take her to a secure place and help her find a housekeeping job. Young Suma had no other choice but to believe her. The lady took Suma in a three-wheeler until they reached a house that night. Suma finally got a chance to take a bath after many days. This lady gave her new clothes and good food. Suma thought the woman must be an angel sent from God.

The next morning, the lady made a phone call. She then took Suma to another home, which was a brothel house. Suma had no idea what was going on in that house, but she saw many other young girls there. After dropping her off, the woman quickly departed. The madam of the brothel told her to take a shower. Madam gave her nice clothes and painted her with makeup. Suma liked to get dressed up. She was so happy until the madam called Suma to her room and told her that she had been sold for a huge amount of money into the life of the brothel. Madam explained everything that she had to do. Suma knew then that she had been deceived by the lady whom
she thought was her angel. She begged Maam to have pity on her because she was so young and did not want to perform sex acts. At the time, Suma had not even reached puberty. Her cries and requests made no difference. Suma was thrown into a dark room and beaten. A couple of days later, she was forced to meet with a customer. He raped her.

Suma was now a slave, locked for years inside the brothel house without any contact with the world. She finally escaped the slavery when a police raid occurred at the brothel. The police had received a tip that a man was holding seven minor girls there for prostitution. The police acted very quickly and made the raid. Suma was one among the seven girls rescued that day. She was moved to a government rehabilitation center in North India. She stayed there for couple of years and then moved into Bombay for further rehabilitation.

Suma is now about 17 years old. She is training to become a hair beautician. During the interview, she did not wish to reveal all that had taken place in the brothel. It was too painful, shameful, and brought back the terrible fears of the past like a nightmare. When she introduced herself, she said “I am Mrs. Suma.” Even in the middle of her pain, she was trying to build her life as “Mrs. Suma.” It is not clear whether she knows the difference between Mrs. and Ms. as titles. When asked about her future plans of having a family, her face blushed with happiness. She has many dreams.

Her biggest dream is to stand on her own two feet and have a family one day. She has no plans to see her parents or other family members. But one day when she can support herself financially, she wants to return to her village and observe them from a distance. She believes in God. She firmly believes that her God will take care of her dream one day. Even though her spirit is still wounded, her faith in God helps her to leave the past behind and go forward to attain her dreams.

Divergent Experiences of God

Ramani sees her life as a total failure. She is a victim of deception, greed, and cruelty. She knows what HIV will do to her life. The caretakers are trying to build hope in her life. She suffers from nightmares, fear, depression, an eating disorder, and bodily pain. She has no love, joy, or affection in her life. She recollects the seven years of slavery as if they were yesterday. She lives with constant pain and nightmares. She has lost the feelings to be loved. She knows that God is love, but to her, God is too far away and seemingly unable to help her. Pessimism controls her. She can only see the impossibility. Ramani believes that she is a failure and no one can do more in her life. Building confidence, faith, courage, and optimism are essential in her case. Even though it will be a long process, Ramani is not a lost cause.

For Suma, on the other hand, the faith and prayer of her parents when she was with them made an impact on her and remained with her during her entrapment in sexual slavery. Her faith was personal and she prayed to God to set her free from the cage. She believes that her prayer was answered when the police raided the brothel house and set her free. She still has anger and resentment, and is not ready to forgive anyone, even herself. Yet, her faith in God helps her to think and work for her life. She believes that God can make her dreams come true. There will be a time when she can forgive others. She is giving God time to heal her wounds.

Ramani and Suma have the same family background. They both were in sexual slavery for many years. But some of the main differences in their lives are the outlook within them about God, hope, optimism, positive thinking, and courage. People who keep their faith and pray during difficult times often cope better than those who have no faith. Both Ramani and Suma were at their wits end and their spirits broken; but for Suma, her faith in God somehow survived enough to aid in recovery. To Suma, prayer and trusting God have become powerful healing factors.

The Role of Attachment and Belief in God in Recovery

Young trafficked girls and women often have some attachment to God. This attachment was developed when they were young through their beliefs in their God, gods, or goddesses. Attachment theory is a concept that holds that an attachment of a child to the mother is the result of the recognition that there are favorable outcomes from the proximity to the mother. Children perform such actions, as clinging, crying, and calling in an effort to achieve this proximity to the mother and its predicted favorable outcomes. Such attachment is a natural instinct and can be nurtured. This is also true in the experiencing of God for many of these girls. For these girls, everything has fallen apart around them and within them. They look for a personal attachment of some sort to share their need, heartache, pain, suffering, shame, and also their dreams. For some girls, this attachment can be to God, and this becomes essential to them.

When these girls were in captivity, they frequently lost or had shaken their inborn attachment to God. They came to doubt the existence of God, or at least his personal presence with them. This is one reason why they are so angry. They prayed to God and it was as if their prayers were never heard, and certainly not answered. An attachment to God can reemerge if they are rescued, if they can experience at least some love, care, and acceptance from their rescuers and caregivers.

The Road to Recovery

Our survey does not reveal a uniform “Indian” response to being victimized by sex trafficking. Though there was often an undercurrent of debilitating fatalism, there was also a sense of God and spirituality which many of the girls and young women reported. Thus, the empirical evidence suggests that the response to trafficking can vary quite a bit from person to person.\(^8\)

\(^8\) For example, see the divergent accounts of Ramani and Sunita in the section dealing with “Experiencing God” in Chapter 3.
In general, the research presented in Chapter 2 reveals the following:

**Anger**
Almost every young woman interviewed for this study expressed strong feelings of anger. This anger was sometimes toward their families, sometimes toward their god or goddess, and almost always toward their abductors. They sometimes even expressed anger toward themselves. In India, open expressions of anger, especially by women, are not culturally acceptable. This must be addressed in order for these girls to feel comfortable when tackling and moving past their feelings of anger during the recovery process.

Support systems where spirituality is fostered can offer an effective environment for the girls to be able to overcome their negativity and anger. Such grounding in faith can be a positive factor in the girls’ recovery.

**Shame**
Regardless of age, victims who experienced the horrors of the sex trade felt ashamed. This shame can directly result from their loss of virginity at a young age. The demand for young, virgin girls in the sex trade is high and creates a situation in which many girls are forced to lose their virginity while in captivity.

Feelings of shame are frequently linked to a dominant religious belief that it was one’s fate to undergo this experience. Thus, the idea that a woman has little or no control over her destiny is common.

**Healing**
The overwhelming majority of the young women we interviewed experienced severe physical abuse during their captivity and now suffer from a variety of physical ailments, including weight loss and malnutrition, physical weakness, headaches, and cervical pain. Many of them suffer from depression, eating disorders, and other psychological conditions due to emotional trauma. The majority of them have contracted an STI and many are HIV positive and/or suffer from tuberculosis. These conditions can be traced to their forced sex work in the brothels.

A holistic approach to their healing process needs to include the right combination of new opportunities, association with a support system, and a positive environment. Emotional healing can often be more difficult to accomplish than physical healing. The dearth of trained psychologists and counselors in NGOs and governmental facilities must be addressed in order for these girls to have a chance of overcoming their emotional obstacles. Also, there is very little attention given to the importance of spiritual healing as a part of these girls’ recovery. This has stemmed partly from the secular nature of the Indian government and the fact that the majority of Indian NGOs do not emphasize such spiritual needs. Many of these girls, after they leave the brothel, seek for spiritual healing, along with emotional and physical healing. Because these three types of healing are intertwined, their healing remains incomplete when they receive only physical help. Those that do receive spiritual help and healing do much better than their counterparts.

**Hope and Future-mindedness**
The majority of the young women we interviewed expressed a desire to continue living in a home with other women who have been rescued from the sex trade. They believe they have found a “new family,” and they find comfort in these groups. These groups provide an alternative to the harsh realities of reintegration into an uninviting society. Often times, the girls seek out such group homes because they lack the self-determination or future-mindedness to move forward on their own. They may want to be independent, but they have difficulty finding positive environments in which to develop and grow.

There is strong evidence that social organizations have helped women rescued from the brothels rebuild their lives by offering the right circumstances and opportunity for the girls to bolster their hope and future-mindedness.

Self-determination is a key predictor of future-mindedness. In most cases, those girls who possess a sense of future-mindedness have been encouraged by their rescuers to develop the skills needed to build their own futures. Moreover, victims who have this resolve to an unusual degree need to be utilized as much as possible in facilitating the recovery of other victims. Several of the girls we interviewed now work at the social organizations that rescued them or are involved in social or advocacy work in order to help other girls who are held captive in the world of sex trafficking.

Belief in a divinity or God is also a key predictor of future-mindedness. A large percentage of the girls connected hope with their belief in God and experience it on a daily basis. Finally,
Forgiveness

- "Sorry" is a word that is not commonly uttered in Indian society. Without such an affirmation of wrongdoing from their abductors, friends, families, or even strangers, many of the girls interviewed for this study continue to feel betrayed. Because of this, most of the girls were not ready to forgive. It is a process that is difficult to begin. Our research shows that trust is a pre-condition for one to forgive—both trust in oneself and trust in others. Trust is a process that involves patience and requires both giving and receiving – realities many victims do not experience. It became clear that many of the victims need to see their abductors receive some sort of punishment for their actions in order for them to be able to forgive their oppressors. This justice is rarely achieved. The girls do not often see these individuals punished by the government, by society, by their religion, or even by their families.

- Forgiveness is often related to one’s religious orientation, including the Hindu belief in karma. One must consider how this belief can influence the victim’s ability to regain self-respect and deal with the complicated and difficult notion of forgiveness. According to the theory of karma, a person’s choices in the past are the main cause of the present situation, whether good or bad. Bad things in the present are viewed as the natural consequence of failures in past lives. Such beliefs have the potential to block victims of trafficking from determining an appropriate consideration of what true forgiveness can and should entail.

- Forgiveness is an act of self-determination. Because of the Indian tendency to believe in fatalism and karma, the girls who were forced into sexual slavery often find themselves imprisoned in a narrow understanding of karma as “their fate.” To most of them, free will and the ability to take control of their own lives remains merely an illusion. They believe that this is the way God set things up through karma, and they do not believe they can change their predetermined path. As a result, the dreams of these girls remain limited, and their advancement is severely narrowed in scope. This problem lies at the heart of efforts to enable victims of trafficking to recover, and it is a central research finding of our study.

- Like future-mindedness, forgiveness appears to be related to age. Younger women (14-20) were more willing to talk about forgiving than women ages 21-40. The younger victims believe that they have more years ahead of them to restore their lives and experience some sort of happiness. This mentality helps them to forgive more easily than can their older counterparts. They also believe that since they lack or lacked control over their situation, it is better to forgive themselves and move on with their lives. As the victims get older, they find it more difficult to forgive. They have a harder time trusting others and adjusting to new situations. They possess more bitterness toward the past and their pain lingers longer than it does for the younger ones. The older victims often remain very cynical towards the idea of forgiveness and remain unwilling to discuss this topic often or publicly.

Experience of God

- A small percentage of the girls interviewed had no belief in God. A larger percentage still believed in God after they were rescued, but were very angry at God for what they had been through. The majority of the girls had some type of faith. A good number of these girls believed while they were in slavery that one day God would deliver them from their captivity.

- Although the girls suffered deeply during their captivity, our study revealed that for many of them, faith in God became the catalyst for them to begin to consider forgiveness and their futures.

- Faith is very important in Indian culture, as religious teaching points to God as the determiner of everyone’s destiny. Victims of sexual trafficking in India experience their ordeals not as if they are blank slates upon which the hard realities of life etch their message. On the contrary, what they experience is set against a background of somewhat diverse but important notions of God, fate, the role of parents and elders, and the meaning of shame. Generally, faith is seen as the last resort for many Indians experiencing hardship. They try to find an answer to their situation through God.

- Many of the girls see and experience God as the guiding, sustaining light in their darkness who protects them and provides for them. Their faith is rooted in these experiences of God—a God they hope can help them fulfill their dreams and aspirations. Experiencing God is a part of their optimism that many of them cannot possess apart from the help of God. They believe that experiencing God is part of their present and their future. They want to forgive themselves and to no longer feel the pain of their pasts. They desire freedom.

Steps to Recovery

To help these victims recover (or in some cases discover for the first time) a strong, positive sense of self, a belief that they can effect their own futures despite their pasts, knowledge of the cultural and religious context is required. Only then can those appropriately positive elements of the cultural and religious tradition be mined which will help assemble the perspectives necessary to complement a strategy designed to facilitate recovery and healing.

The girls who are victims of sexual slavery feel a great deal of anger toward all who wronged them. They need to release this pent up rage in order to deal with their pain. This is a very crucial step in improving their physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Since they have not had any chance to express their anger to their abductors and abusers, intense counseling that includes anger management lessons and spiritual development is indispensable for these girls as a part of their healing process.

In addition, many of the girls possess strong feelings of shame because of their past and often carry heavy burdens of guilt for the rest of their lives. They are more concerned about how others perceive them than how they perceive themselves. As we interviewed the girls, it became evident that they need to develop a sense of self-esteem and confidence to help them work through the shame that they shoulder.

To address the anger and shame produced by their wretched past experiences, the girls need to find strong support systems that can include assistance from NGOs, the government, their communities, and their families. They need to be made to feel that they are part of the mainstream society and that they are not and will not be ostracized. A positive, supportive environment can start to fill the angry, shameful voids which burden their lives. They need to experience freedom in their lives—freedom to be economically empowered, self-determined, and self-expressive.
Healing for these girls involves a holistic approach that acknowledges their spiritual, emotional, and physical wounds. From our study, it is evident that this healing process should begin as soon as the girls are rescued. At the point of intervention, they are vulnerable and scared. The treatment of their wounds should begin immediately. Sadly, this is not currently standard procedure, and the girls are often left waiting for treatment for long periods of time due to a lack of facilities, staffing, and money. This type of intervention may require the Government of India to provide more funding and resources in order to address such structural issues. Through our study, we found that many of the NGOs that are currently assisting rescued victims do not have the capacity or experience to address properly the girls’ physical and psychological needs. A renewed partnership and strategic plan between the Indian government and these NGOs can undoubtedly add value to the healing process for these girls.

All of these girls are very concerned about their future. After their rescue, they are preoccupied with anxious thoughts like, where will they go, how they will survive, what they can do with their lives, who will help them, whom they can trust, and what their futures will be? Many times their concerns are not answered. The NGOs are often incapable of offering them anything substantial. The government has not offered a full package of assistance. When they begin to lose hope, many feel forced to return to brothel life for survival. For many, brothel life is all they really know, and they know no other way to provide for themselves. Their childhood dreams to live well, have families, be self-sufficient, and live a good life have been shattered. On occasion, these girls will both return to prostitution and traumatically even help recruit others to the trade. Thus, the vicious cycle of human trafficking spirals on, with the victims even playing a role in perpetuating the degradation.

Many of the girls we interviewed believe in fate and karma. We found that such beliefs have influenced and often impeded their progress towards future-mindedness and hope. Such beliefs need to be understood and considered when addressing the best methods to develop the girls’ independence and self-sufficiency. Programs such as job training, economic empowerment, and decision-making can invigorate self-determination.

We found during our study that the rescued girls tended to stay together in their own communities because they felt safe amongst others who have experienced similar hardships. Although these group homes can provide the girls with a sense of security, they can have a tendency to hinder the girls from moving forward. It was clear that more programs are needed in these group homes to help develop the girls’ independence in order for them to be able to move on from their pasts. Another interesting finding of our study was that many of the rescued girls who have moved forward have found helping others to be something they enjoy and want to do. Whether it be training in social services fields, sharing of their own experiences to others, or working in NGOs that are addressing similar issues, such community-centered desires can and should be promoted and nurtured. It should be the duty of the government, NGOs, and society as a whole to find ways to assist them in securing self-determination and hope for their futures. These girls need to believe that there is a life after their brutal pasts.

Many of the girls who were interviewed expressed their concern about the lack of freedom they feel even after they are rescued from sexual slavery. They feel controlled and intimidated. Our research shows that they are still angry at the government, and this can spill out into anger at everyone, because they now feel trapped again in a new facility. It is clear that the rescued girls need to be treated with dignity and respect by both the Indian government and the NGOs that are assisting them. This may mean a refocused commitment to listen attentively to the girls regarding their feelings, priorities, and desires for the future.

Forgiveness is a key component of both emotional healing and the development of future-mindedness. Many of the girls expressed frustration in their journeys toward forgiveness. They felt that their ability to forgive the transgressions of their abusers was hindered by the lack of punishment of their abusers. It was clear that the girls do notice the impotence of the justice system and the few convictions of sex offenders that occur. Although the justice system certainly cannot be “fixed” overnight, it is apparent that those who can learn how to forgive themselves and others make better recoveries and have more positive attitudes than those who remain mired in their bitterness. A strong focus on forgiveness during their spiritual counseling can certainly promote healing.

Finally, faith and attachment to God can play influential roles in the girls’ recovery. Such spiritual context has not necessarily been integrated into their rehabilitation programs. It seems that the Indian government, the international community, and many NGOs have significantly neglected the spiritual recovery of trafficking victims and have devoted little or no resources to this area. As we have explored the importance of faith in Indian culture, it seems that such spirituality can be a powerful stimulant to the girls’ survival and recovery. With faith, victims can find optimism and be open to experiences which can help them move forward. For many of the girls, faith can be an integral part of their struggle against their shame, heal their spirit, and embolden their hopes. This spiritual recovery is difficult and slow, but critically important.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Through our study, we have come to understand much better just how devastating the theft of human dignity can be. This dignity needs to be recovered, but the process is not quick nor is it easy. Our research indicates that these girls desire their independence and to stand on their own two feet. This can only be achieved by cultivating in practical ways a sense that they really can influence and shape their own destinies. This is a multi-step process that includes facing anger and shame headfirst, finding the strength to forgive themselves and their abusers, escaping their physical, emotional, and spiritual pain through counseling and empowerment, fostering their abilities to be economically independent and forward-thinking. This is a holistic process which can lead to a recovery of dignity, independence, and self-worth. This is a daunting process and not a panacea for all of their woes, but it is a process which can work.

As Sir John Templeton has said, “The secret of a productive life can be sought and found.” After the torture that these girls have endured, they are now searching for a new beginning and happiness in their life. Sir John asserted that happiness is always a by-product. These girls are looking to humanity for help so that they can survive and move on. They also desire to assist others who are undergoing similar pain. These girls maintain their hope for a better tomorrow even though their spirits often seemed damaged beyond repair. They are shattered vessels which have to be put back together and lovingly reshaped. To be successful, however, it is a process which must be deeply respectful of the ability and necessity of the girls themselves playing a primary role in their own recoveries.

Recommendations for Further Research

- More studies are needed in the Indian context in order to address the societal stigma of publicly expressing one’s anger and how to deal with that anger.
- Further research should be conducted on the connection between spirituality and the ability to handle one’s negativity and anger.
- Further research should be conducted on how the notion of fate can be countered to assist in the recovery of sex trafficking victims.
- Further research should be conducted on individualism and self-determination in the Eastern context.
- Further research is needed on how shame and guilt affect these girls’ lives, their hopes, and their future aspirations.
- Further research is needed on how end cultural tolerance of spousal abuse of women, abuse of women in general, and gender inequality, which is at the root of these problems.
- Specific strategies must be developed to empower the victims to move beyond the powerlessness of fate to the hope of self-improvement.
- More research should be conducted to determine the psychological impact of sexual slavery on young women.
- Research should be conducted to ascertain the extent to which governmental and non-governmental agencies in India have the training and resources necessary to address the psychological trauma of women who have been rescued from the sex trade.
- Interventions must be developed to facilitate spiritual and psychological healing.
- More research is needed on optimism and future-mindedness in India. Only recently have these two subjects begun to receive public attention in the country, specifically in relation to socio-economic development.
- Further research should be conducted on the relationship between future-mindedness and faith. The linkage between the two can enhance the healing process.
- Since most of the girls in this study were not ready to forgive, more study is needed to understand the long-term psychological effects of this trauma on the victims and on how their bondage has shaped their personalities.
- Further research is needed on how faith and personal development are linked together in Indian and Eastern society.
- Further research is needed on the role of faith in the healing process of trafficked victims in Indian society.
- Further research is needed on the role that faith and future-mindedness can play as an antidote to the debilitating paralysis of a belief in determinism and fate—a belief often encountered in Eastern societies.

Recommendations on How Various Groups Can Help

It should be restated emphatically that there are two realities which must never be ignored and which must be addressed to the fullest extent possible. First, those who are trafficked are almost always victims first of economic hardship and limited employment prospects. Second, almost all who are trafficked are victimized by misinformation and lies. Thus, everyone at all levels—locally, nationally, and internationally—must redouble efforts to get the word out to the poorest neighborhoods about the lies which lead to trafficking. In addition, of course, the successful prosecution of those involved in these crimes against humanity must be a focus of the community at all levels.

Based on the research and findings of this study, several focused recommendations are in order.

Recommendations to the Indian Government:

- Human trafficking and other human rights violations should be more energetically monitored and controlled by the central government, assisted by a special task force devoted to dealing with the crime of trafficking. Parliament should pass legislation that will provide the authority to take action across state borders without the needed permission of the state government to combat these crimes.
- Members of the judicial system, police officers, and lawyers should be made more aware of this issue by promoting faster and more efficient court processes.
- The Indian government should monitor and provide necessary funding and resources to NGOs working with the rescued girls in order to assist in their full recovery.
- The Indian government should work towards the welfare of rescued girls and take action to reintegrate them into the community by working and supporting the NGOs and evaluating the progress they make in the rehabilitation process.
- The Indian government should support scholarly research in universities and colleges on the psychological effects of teenage sexual abuse and human rights violations that occur within Indian society. This research can be presented in school curricula and in sociology, psychology, and religion classes.

Recommendations to NGOs on the ground in India:

- NGOs should train their staff to care for victims rescued from brothels in a holistic approach. This training might require additional funding from the government or private sources in order to provide proper education on how to treat the girls’ physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Whenever possible, this treatment should be carried out by trained counselors, doctors, and healthcare providers.
- All NGOs that are working with rescued trafficking victims should provide education and job training whenever possible in order to enliven hope and instigate self-esteem, thus contributing to the restoration of stolen dignity.
- NGOs in India should take measures to fight against the stigma that the girls who have been rescued from sexual slavery face when they seek to return to their homes and their communities. This should include more campaigns to promote awareness of the issue of sex trafficking in India.
Recommendations to U.S.-Based NGOs:

- NGOs in the U.S. can help provide the necessary tools and mechanisms to enable the holistic healing process for victims of sexual trade.
- NGOs in the U.S. can play a leading role in promoting awareness of the international human rights issue of human trafficking. In addition, they too can emphasize the need for holistic healing for these young victims.

Recommendations to the U.S. Congress/Government:

- Congress should aggressively work through agencies associated with the Indian government to address issues of human trafficking and other human rights violations.
- Congress should encourage American businesses to be part of the solution and work with the Indian government on human rights violations including child labor which often leads to sexual slavery.
- As human trafficking is an issue even in America, Congress should raise more awareness on this issue to the general public.

Recommendations to Faith-Based Institutions in America:

- Churches and other faith-based institutions can provide financial assistance to NGOs working among human trafficked victims.
- Faith-based institutions should also promote the holistic healing programs for the recovery of these girls, especially their spiritual healing.

It is clear that sex trafficking is an issue that is not only for India to address, but also one in which the international community as a whole needs to be involved. The above recommendations are merely a small portion of the possible ways in which this grave situation can begin to be tackled. By focusing on the recovery of the victims, we have attempted to provide suggestions on how to help them begin the process of restoring dignity and hope for a better future. Although many have exposed the seriousness of this crime against humanity, the victims’ own stories of stolen lives have often been ignored. It is time to focus on their road toward recovery in the confidence that helping them realize their own self-worth and powers of self-determination can lead them towards a positive and productive future.

Appendix A

Interview Questions to Trafficked Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family Background (Father, Mother, Brother and Sister)</td>
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<td>2. Economic Background</td>
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<td>3. Educational Background</td>
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<td>4. Social Background (Village/Town)</td>
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<td>5. Who introduced them about the new business opportunity?</td>
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<td>6. What was the story told by the abductor to the family and to the victim?</td>
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<td>7. What was the family response?</td>
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<td>8. How did she come to this new trade?</td>
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<td>9. Briefly describe the suffering in the cage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. What was her age at the time of her bondage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Number of years in bondage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. How was she rescued? (Raid/Escape/Social Organization)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sleeping condition (Good/Average/Bad)</td>
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<td>2. Appetite (Good/Average/Bad)</td>
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<td>3. Nightmares (Yes/No)</td>
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<td>4. Depression (Yes/No)</td>
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<td>5. Happiness &amp; Joy (Good/Average/Bad)</td>
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<td>6. Anger (Yes/No)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Concept of Forgiveness</th>
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<td>1. Can she forgive herself (Yes/No)</td>
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<td>2. Can she forgive her parents (Yes/No)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Can she forgive her abductor (Yes/No)</td>
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<th>Concept of Future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does she have any dreams about her future (Yes/No)</td>
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<td>2. What is the dream for her future?</td>
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<td>3. What she is doing to achieve her goals?</td>
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Appendix B

Survey Results

Appendix B reflects research findings based on one hundred interviews primarily conducted within two major cities in India (December 2007 and January 2008) – New Delhi and Mumbai. Those interviewed were formerly trafficked victims who ranged from thirteen to thirty years of age. The majority of the girls were still teenagers. (See Chapter 1 for further information on the “methodology” utilized.)

Sample Size: 100 girls

Sickness

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD): 48%
HIV Positive: 42%
TB: 40%
HIV/AIDS: 9%
Other: 2%
The majority of the girls we interviewed were suffering from some sickness. Almost half are HIV positive.

Educational Level

No Education: 54%
Some Education (6th – 12th Grade): 28%
Little Education (<5th Grade): 19%
Completed High School: 1%
Most of the girls we talked to came from a background of little to no education.

Economic Background

Poor: 50%
Very Poor: 26%
Middle Class: 17%
Upper Middle Class: 5%
Lower Middle Class: 2%
(According to the World Bank, 85.7% of the population of India lives on $2.50 a day, while 24.3% of the population lives on $1.00 a day).84
More than 75% of the girls came from a poor to very poor economic background. This economic depravity, in many cases, created a vulnerability that could easily be “snatched” by the lure of a job in the big city and an income to bring home to the family.

Age at the Time of Initiation into Sexual Bondage

Age 13-15: 49%
Age 16-20: 31%
Age 8-12: 14%
Age 21+: 6%
Young girls, especially those who are still virgins, are the most prized targets for the brothel agents. The majority of the girls we interviewed were under the age of 21 at the time of their captivity. About half were between the ages of 12 and 15. 15% were between the ages of 8 and 12.

Years in Sexual Bondage

5-9 Years: 33%
1-4 Years: 31%
10-14 Years: 13%
15-19 Years: 10%
20+ Years: 8%
Less than 1 Year: 5%
The girls spend varied times in captivity, ranging from less than one year to over twenty years. The majority spent between one and nine years in bondage.

Nightmares

Yes: 75%
No: 25%
The girls have suffered many psychological issues following their rescue from the brothels. The majority of them are plagued by nightmares and have trouble sleeping soundly.

Depression

Yes: 83%
No: 17%
Over 80% of the rescued girls now suffer from depression.

Anger

Yes: 79%
No: 21%
Most of the rescued girls now feel angry – angry about their past sufferings, angry at themselves, angry toward their captors.

Survivor Guilt

Yes: 86%
No: 14%
The majority of the girls now experience survivor guilt. They place a large amount of blame on themselves for what has happened to them. They feel ashamed and embarrassed.

Spirituality

Has Faith: 86%
Has No Faith: 14%
Almost all of the girls had some grounding in spirituality. Although several are very angry with God because of the terror they have experienced, many still look to God for security and for help in moving forward.

Forgiveness – Can She Forgive Herself?

Yes: 63%
No: 33%
No Response: 4%

Can She Forgive Her Parents?

Yes: 66%
No: 32%
No Response: 2%
Can She Forgive Her Abductor?

Yes: 18%
No: 82%

Forgiveness is an ongoing struggle for these girls. Over half of them felt that they could forgive themselves and their parents. However, the majority of the girls do not think they can forgive their abductors. This is because often, they want to see their abductors brought to justice for their crimes.

Future-Mindedness

Has dreams for the future: 78%
Dreams to Help Others in the Brothel: 23%
Has no dreams for the future: 22%
Dreams to Get a Job: 20%
Dreams for a Good Life for Her Child: 17%
Other: 17%
Dreams to Stand on Her Own Two Feet: 16%
Dreams to Get Married: 15%
Dreams to Return Home: 6%
Dreams to Have a Family: 5%

Over three-fourths of the group we interviewed dream about the future. These dreams vary, but many involve helping others.

Trust

Trust God and only Some People: 51%
Trusts No one: 34%
Only Trusts God/Allah/Goddess: 15%

Our research shows that trust must be a pre-condition for one to forgive—both trust in oneself and trust in others. It is difficult for many of the victims to confide in and trust in other people. At the moment, the girls struggle to trust people. Over half of the girls feel that they can trust God and only some people. A third feel that they cannot trust anyone at this point.

Appendix C

About the Authors

Dr. Victor Joseph was born and raised in India. Immigrating to the United States in 1986, Dr. Joseph worked as a financial consultant on Wall Street. He completed his Master of Divinity at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He continued his education at Trinity International University in Deerfield, IL, and received a masters in religious studies. He also completed his doctorate in leadership at AGTS (Springfield, MO). Dr. Joseph served as Professor of Intercultural Studies at Valley Forge Christian College, a position held from 1996-2006. He has also served as a guest speaker in seminars, conferences, and universities, and is the author of numerous articles.

Dr. Joseph has worked for more than seven years with the Office of Religious Freedom at the U.S. Department of State, Congress, and the White House as an advocate for religious freedom addressing the human rights issues in many nations including India. Currently, he serves as the Chairman for Governmental Affairs of the Federation of Indian Christians of North America, which is based in Washington D.C. This organization promotes human rights and religious freedom in India and surrounding nations. Through this organization, he has worked with the U.S. Department of State and the Indian Government campaigning for religious liberty, human rights, freedom for the lowest caste, and community transformation. He has collaborated with various non-governmental organizations in India that address education, HIV/AIDS, poverty, human trafficking, and other human rights issues.

Dr. Kent R. Hill is Vice President for Character Development at the John Templeton Foundation. He is responsible for creating large-scale programmatic initiatives that engage fundamental questions regarding the nature, development, and benefits of the virtues and character strengths. Before joining the Foundation in early 2009, Dr. Hill served for seven and a half years in two senior administrative positions at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Washington D.C.—Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Europe and Asia and Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Global Health. He was USAID’s senior inter-agency liaison for matters involving Trafficking in Persons.

Dr. Hill’s previous career includes nine years as president of Eastern Nazarene College (Quincy, MA), six years as president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (Washington, D.C), and six years as a history teacher at Seattle Pacific University. An authority on religion in communist countries, he is the author of The Soviet Union on the Brink (1991). Dr. Hill received his B.A. in history from Northwest Nazarene College and an M.A. in Russian studies from the University of Washington (Seattle), where he also received his Ph.D. in history.
Appendix D

About the John Templeton Foundation

The John Templeton Foundation (www.templeton.org) serves as a philanthropic catalyst for research on what scientists and philosophers call the Big Questions. We support work at the world’s top universities in such fields as theoretical physics, cosmology, evolutionary biology, cognitive science, and social science relating to love, forgiveness, creativity, purpose, and the nature and origin of religious belief. We encourage informed, open-minded dialogue between scientists and theologians as they apply themselves to the most profound issues in their particular disciplines. And we seek to stimulate new thinking about wealth creation in the developing world, character education in schools and universities, and programs for cultivating the talents of gifted children.

Contact

Victor Joseph
P.O. Box 221
Valley Forge, PA 19481-0221
victorjoseph@verizon.net

Credits

Photography
Steven Adams: Cover, Pages 1, 3, 38, 51, 52, 58, 74
Victor Joseph: Pages 7, 23, 24, 30
Alan Edwards: Pages 11, 21, 27, 44, 62, 66

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Cause Design Co.

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