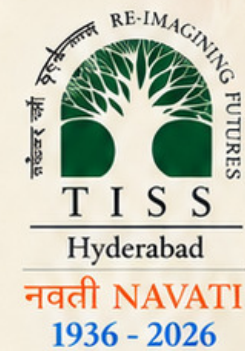


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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING

A Review of the Literature

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School of Gender and Livelihoods, TISS Hyderabad

Working Paper No. 13
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Domestic Violence and Vulnerability to Trafficking

A Review of the Literature

Nilanjana Ray^{*}

Introduction

Gender-based violence is the most pervasive form of human rights violation globally. Among its various forms, domestic violence is the most common, as the victim is easily accessible.¹ Moreover, in many cultures, the family is deemed ‘private’ and therefore beyond the purview of state intervention. In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) undertook a global survey of the prevalence of gender-based violence and declared that one in three women experience violence from their partner in their lifetime.²

Studies have noted several gender-related factors that are predictive of the prevalence of domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence: norms about male control over female behaviour, norms normalising wife beating, and the extent to which law and practice disadvantage women in the ownership of productive resources such as land and property.³ Gender-related discrimination in family law, including differential rights to child custody and to marriage and divorce, also predicts levels of violence against women. Domestic violence is less prevalent in countries with high female labour force participation. In communities where wife abuse is normative, a girl’s education is strongly associated with a reduced risk of violence.

Research that has established the negative consequences of domestic violence has focused on ‘physical’ and ‘sexual’ violence, and has found that women who experience these types of violence are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV. Gender-based violence is a profound public health problem, as it compromises women’s physical health and erodes their self-esteem. In addition to injury, violence

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¹ L. L. Heise, M. Ellsberg, and M. Gottemoeller, “A Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence”, *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 78, suppl. 1 (2002): S5–S14.

² J. Mannell and S. Hawkes, “Decriminalisation of Gender-Based Violence Is a Global Health Problem”, *BMJ Global Health* 2 (2017): e000438, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2017-000438>.

³ L. L. Heise and A. Kotsadam, “Cross-National and Multilevel Correlates of Partner Violence: An Analysis of Data from Population-Based Surveys”, *Lancet Global Health* 3 (2015): e332–40.

results in long-term health problems such as chronic pain, physical disability, sexually transmitted infections and adverse pregnancy outcomes.⁴ Studies have noted significant mental health consequences as well, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, alcohol or drug abuse and suicidal ideation.⁵

A follow-up survey by WHO in 2018 included the category of ‘psychological’ violence, defined as intimidation, constant belittling and humiliation, and of ‘controlling behaviours’, such as isolating an individual from her family and friends, monitoring her movements, restricting her access to information and services and not allowing her to work outside the home. Within these parameters, the survey found that globally 27 per cent of married/partnered women of reproductive age (15–49 years) experience partner violence at least once in their lifetime. South Asia has the highest incidence of domestic violence, at 35 per cent.⁶ However, measuring ‘acts’ of violence does not describe the atmosphere of terror that often permeates abusive relationships. Moreover, women have reported that psychological abuse and degradation are even more difficult to endure than the physical abuse itself.⁷

There are two major lacunae in surveys and studies on domestic violence. First, they focus on the negative consequences of domestic violence only in the domain of physical and mental health. None of the studies on violence against women has investigated the consequences for the human security of these women, which result in their trafficking. A report by USAID (2007) specifically on the link between domestic violence and trafficking commented that domestic violence directly influences physical and mental health and is indirectly connected to trafficking through the mediating factor of leaving home.⁸ This distancing of human security from domestic violence results in the denial that domestic violence leads to trafficking. As a result, preventing domestic violence is not considered a preventive intervention against trafficking. Anti-trafficking interventions are crafted around the creation of livelihoods for women in home communities and the dissemination of information on safe migration, ignoring the role of domestic violence as a risk factor for trafficking. The second lacuna in violence studies is that they look only through the lens of intimate partner violence. Children in the family often share the burden of violent victimisation along with

⁴ Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller, “Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence”.

⁵ Mannell and Hawkes, “Decriminalisation of Gender-Based Violence”.

⁶ World Health Organization, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018* (Geneva: WHO, 2021).

⁷ Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller, “Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence”.

⁸ USAID, *Examining the Intersection between Trafficking in Persons and Domestic Violence* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2007).

their mothers or may face abuse on their own. Research has produced two separate silos to accommodate child victims of domestic violence: ‘Runaway Youth’ and ‘Child Abuse and Maltreatment’. Domestic violence studies do not accommodate them within their domain and, hence, domestic violence against children is not termed as such. As a result, prevalent studies ignore this category of victims. This paper addresses these two lacunae by demonstrating how domestic violence can be perpetrated by non-partners as well, on both women and children, resulting in their trafficking. I argue that the ‘mediating factor’ of leaving home is actually the result of the violence perpetrated on the victim at home and should be redefined as a direct link between domestic violence and trafficking.

Domestic Violence and Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

That domestic violence is a cause of vulnerability to trafficking has been widely acknowledged by studies on children trapped in commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). For the past decade, research on domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) has overtaken studies on international trafficking in the United States. The earlier orientation of looking at minor victims of CSE as ‘runaways’ and ‘delinquents’ gave way to viewing them as ‘victims of trafficking’ under Safe Harbor laws that provide immunity from prosecution to minors, who are instead referred to youth-serving agencies. The previous categories of studies on ‘runaway/homeless youth’ and ‘abused/maltreated children’ have merged under the banner of DMST, and the factors leading to exploitation have been explored more holistically.

The academic tradition of looking at social problems through an individual-level causal lens is seen in research on DMST too. The ‘dysfunctional’ home environment and ‘abusive’ interpersonal relationships have highlighted the role of domestic violence in making children vulnerable. The dysfunctional family is defined as one that is mired in poverty;⁹ in which the primary caregiver has

⁹ T. W. Brandt et al., “Identifying Youth at Risk for Commercial Sexual Exploitation within Child Advocacy Centres: A State-Wide Pilot Study”, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518766560>; K. Countryman-Roswurm and B. L. Bolin, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Assessing and Reducing Risk”, *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 31 (2014): 521–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-014-0336-6>.

mental health issues;¹⁰ in which the caregiver has a history of substance abuse;¹¹ in which children have been in conflict with their parents;¹² or in which children have been maltreated through neglect and emotional abuse.¹³ Neglected and maltreated youth have consistently been found to be at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Neglect, or a lack of interpersonal relationships with caregivers, has the potential to be as serious an adversity as abuse, leading a child to seek relationships with individuals outside the family, who could be traffickers.¹⁴ Children whose caregivers have substance abuse problems are three times more likely to be abused at home and four times more likely to be neglected.¹⁵ Neglect might appear to be a less harmful form of abuse, but it has been reported as the most frequent form of abuse by victims of CSE.¹⁶ A poor support system at home results in poor relationships.¹⁷ It is, thus, a cluster of risks around abuse, neglect, trauma and childhood

- ¹⁰ L. Fedina, C. Williamson, and T. Perdue, "Risk Factors for Domestic Child Sex Trafficking in the United States", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516662306>; J. A. Reid, "An Exploratory Model of Girls' Vulnerability to Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Prostitution", *Child Maltreatment* 16, no. 2 (2011): 146–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559511404700>.
- ¹¹ Brandt et al., "Identifying Youth at Risk"; E. B. Fichtelman, "The Double Entendre of Juvenile Prostitution: Victim versus Delinquent and the Necessity of State Uniformity", *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 65, nos. 3–4 (2014): 27–46; R. M. Hartinger-Saunders, A. R. Trouetaud, and J. M. Johnson, "Mandated Reporters' Perceptions of and Encounters with Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Adolescent Females in the United States", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 87, no. 3 (2017): 195–205, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000151>; Reid, "Exploratory Model of Girls' Vulnerability"; L. N. Robinson, "The Globalization of Female Child Prostitution: A Call for Reintegration and Recovery Measures via Article 39 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child", *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 5, no. 1 (1997): 239–61.
- ¹² N. A. Boxill and D. J. Richardson, "Ending Sex Trafficking of Children in Atlanta", *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 22, no. 2 (2007): 138–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109907299054>; Countryman-Roswurm and Bolin, "Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking"; A. Marcus et al., "Conflict and Agency among Sex Workers and Pimps: A Closer Look at Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 653 (2014): 225–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214521993>; J. S. Middleton et al., "Youth Experiences Survey (YES): Exploring the Scope and Complexity of Sex Trafficking in a Sample of Youth Experiencing Homelessness", *Journal of Social Service Research* 44, no. 2 (2018): 141–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2018.1428924>.
- ¹³ K. Baird, K. P. MacDonald, and J. Connolly, "Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in a Southern Ontario Region: Police File Review Exploring Victim Characteristics, Trafficking Experiences and the Intersection with Child Welfare", *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 52, no. 1 (2020): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000151>; Boxill and Richardson, "Ending Sex Trafficking"; J. Cole et al., "The Trauma of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth: A Comparison of CSE Victims to Sexual Abuse Victims in a Clinical Sample", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31, no. 1 (2016): 122–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514555133>.
- ¹⁴ J. E. O'Brien, "'Sometimes, Somebody Just Needs Somebody – Anybody – to Care': The Power of Interpersonal Relationships in the Lives of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Survivors", *Child Abuse and Neglect* 81 (2018): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.04.010>; C. Hounmenou and C. O'Grady, "A Review and Critique of the US Responses to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children", *Children and Youth Services Review* 98 (2019): 188–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.01.005>.
- ¹⁵ J. A. Reid and A. R. Piquero, "Age-Graded Risks for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Male and Female Youth", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29, no. 9 (2014): 1747–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513511535>.
- ¹⁶ C. Williamson and M. Prior, "Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Network of Underground Players in the Midwest", *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* 2 (2009): 46–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361520802702191>.
- ¹⁷ Brandt et al., "Identifying Youth at Risk"; J. L. Moore et al., "Trafficking Experiences and Psychosocial Features of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Victims", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517703373>.

adversity that predisposes a child to being vulnerable to trafficking.¹⁸

For most victims, domestic violence comprises two components: physical violence and sexual abuse.¹⁹ Physical assault is a common experience.²⁰ One study reported that 90 per cent of the minor victims of trafficking had experienced physical violence at home prior to victimisation,²¹ while another found that 51 per cent of the victim participants had experienced physical violence.²² While physical abuse is less frequently viewed as a precursor to CSE, its long-term outcomes are not very different from those of sexual abuse. Emotional problems stem from the trauma of physical abuse, as the abusers are often people on whom the victim relies for care. Outcomes of physical abuse include fear, anxiety, depression, self-destructive behaviour, anger, aggression, guilt and shame, an impaired ability to trust, and runaway behaviour.²³

Sexual abuse at home has been found to be the most highly predictive risk factor for sex trafficking.²⁴

¹⁸ Countryman-Roswurm and Bolin, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”; C. L. Miller, G. Duke, and S. Northam, “Child Sex-Trafficking Recognition, Intervention, and Referral: An Educational Framework for the Development of Health-Care-Provider Education Programs”, *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2, no. 3 (2016): 177–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1133990>; Reid and Piquero, “Age-Graded Risks”; J. S. Middleton et al., “Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Homelessness: A Critical Examination of the Association between Specific ACEs and Sex Trafficking among Homeless Youth in Kentuckiana”, *Journal of Human Trafficking* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2021.2020061>.

¹⁹ O’Brien, “‘Sometimes, Somebody Just Needs Somebody’”.

²⁰ Brandt et al., “Identifying Youth at Risk”; C. L. Chapple and B. L. Crawford, “Mental Health Diagnoses of Youth Commercial Sexual Exploitation Victims: An Analysis within an Adjudicated Delinquent Sample”, *Journal of Family Violence* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00065-z>; J. E. Cobbina and S. S. Oselin, “It’s Not Only for the Money: An Analysis of Adolescent versus Adult Entry into Street Prostitution”, *Sociological Inquiry* 81, no. 3 (2011): 310–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2011.00375.x>; Cole et al., “Trauma of Commercial Sexual Exploitation”; Fichtelman, “Double Entendre of Juvenile Prostitution”; L. Gerassi, “From Exploitation to Industry: Definitions, Risks and Consequences of Domestic Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work among Women and Girls”, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 25 (2015): 591–605, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2014.991055>; S. M. Goldenberg et al., “Exploring the Context of Trafficking and Adolescent Sex Industry Involvement in Tijuana, Mexico: Consequences for HIV Risk and Prevention”, *Violence Against Women* 21, no. 4 (2015): 478–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215569079>; T. Mir, “Trick or Treat: Why Minors Engaged in Prostitution Should Be Treated as Victims, Not Criminals”, *Family Court Review* 51, no. 1 (2013): 163–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12016>; J. E. O’Brien, K. White, and C. F. Rizo, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking among Child Welfare–Involved Youth: An Exploratory Study of Correlates”, *Child Maltreatment* 22, no. 3 (2017): 265–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559517709995>; Williamson and Prior, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”.

²¹ Countryman-Roswurm and Bolin, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”.

²² Gerassi, “From Exploitation to Industry”.

²³ L. A. Kramer and E. C. Berg, “A Survival Analysis of Timing of Entry into Prostitution: The Differential Impact of Race, Educational Level, and Childhood/Adolescent Risk Factors”, *Sociological Inquiry* 73, no. 4 (2003): 511–28.

²⁴ D. Bounds, W. A. Julion, and K. R. Delaney, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and State Child Welfare Systems”, *Policy, Politics, and Nursing Practice* 16, nos. 1–2 (2015): 17–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527154415583124>; Boxill and Richardson, “Ending Sex Trafficking”; Brandt et al., “Identifying Youth at Risk”; Fedina, Williamson, and Perdue, “Risk Factors for Domestic”; Fichtelman, “Double Entendre of Juvenile Prostitution”; Middleton et al., “Adverse Childhood Experiences”; Mir, “Trick or Treat”; O’Brien, White, and Rizo, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”; Williamson and Prior, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”.

Sexual molestation, rape and incest marked early entry into sexual exploitation.²⁵ The family is the site of sexual abuse during childhood.²⁶ Childhood abuse has been shown to increase the likelihood of victims entering CSE by nearly 50 per cent.²⁷ One study revealed that 53 per cent had experienced sexual abuse at home prior to victimisation.²⁸ Often the cycle of exploitation begins when an adult family member or family friend sexually abuses a minor child under his care. The prevalence of sexual abuse among female adolescents in CSE has been found to range from 26 per cent to 73 per cent.²⁹ Another study reported that one-third of the sample had experienced extensive sexual abuse.³⁰ Girls with a history of sexual abuse develop associated emotional and psychological problems that make them more vulnerable to enticement by traffickers.³¹ Thus, sexual abuse and rape during childhood and adolescence directly shaped the pathway to CSE,³² sometimes doubling the odds of entering CSE.³³

LGBTQ youth might be thrown out of their homes when they reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity to their family.³⁴ Disrupted family lives, i.e. broken homes, also contribute to children's insecurity and vulnerability.³⁵ An absent father has been especially identified by victims as a cause of home instability.³⁶ Witnessing family violence may also create an unstable setting for young people, decreasing their resilience to victimisation outside the family.³⁷ Experiencing crisis

²⁵ Cobbina and Oselin, "It's Not Only for the Money".

²⁶ Robinson, "Globalization of Female Child Prostitution".

²⁷ Hartinger-Saunders, Trouteaud, and Johnson, "Mandated Reporters' Perceptions".

²⁸ Gerassi, "From Exploitation to Industry".

²⁹ Brandt et al., "Identifying Youth at Risk".

³⁰ Countryman-Roswurm and Bolin, "Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking".

³¹ A. Rand, "It Can't Happen in My Backyard: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States", *Child and Youth Services* 31 (2009): 138–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2009.524480>.

³² Goldenberg et al., "Exploring the Context of Trafficking".

³³ G. C. Hammond and M. McGlone, "Entry, Progression, Exit, and Service Provision for Survivors of Sex Trafficking: Implications for Effective Interventions", *Global Social Welfare* (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40609-014-0010-0>.

³⁴ Hounmenou and O'Grady, "Review and Critique".

³⁵ Brandt et al., "Identifying Youth at Risk"; L. Cusick, "Youth Prostitution: A Literature Review", *Child Abuse Review* 11 (2002): 230–51, <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.743>; Mir, "Trick or Treat".

³⁶ S.J. Cecchet and J. Thoburn, "The Psychological Experience of Child and Adolescent Sex Trafficking in the United States: Trauma and Resilience in Survivors", *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 6, no. 5 (2014): 482–93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035763>.

³⁷ L. de Vries, M. Baglivio, and J. A. Reid, "Examining Individual and Contextual Correlates of Victimization for Juvenile Human Trafficking in Florida", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 39, nos. 23–24 (2024): 4748–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241243332>; H. Franchino-Olsen, "Frameworks and Theories Relevant for Organizing Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Risk Factors: A Systematic Review of Proposed Frameworks to Conceptualize Vulnerabilities", *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019849575>; Hartinger-Saunders, Trouteaud, and Johnson, "Mandated Reporters' Perceptions".

due to family violence and the resultant housing instability leads to CSE victimisation.³⁸ If caregivers fail to protect, nurture or guide children, the latter are more likely to seek outsiders to fulfil these emotional needs, making them vulnerable to exploitation.³⁹ Traffickers identify youth with unmet emotional needs for love, care and attention and for a parent-like figure. They specifically target minors from unstable homes.⁴⁰ Thus, DMST is not a monolithic phenomenon but an experience intersected with vulnerability and violence.⁴¹ The highest risk profile is that of the vulnerable runaway adolescent with an extensive history of child abuse.⁴²

Many studies identify runaway youth as vulnerable to sex trafficking recruitment.⁴³ Running away is not so much an act of demonstrating independence as an adaptive response to an abusive or neglectful living situation.⁴⁴ Children who experience abuse, maltreatment, violence and neglect at home may feel the need to escape from home onto the street.⁴⁵ Sometimes the victims report being ‘thrown out/away’ by their families, while others moved out on their own to escape from an unsafe home.⁴⁶ Maltreated girls are more likely to be runaways than their peers.⁴⁷ Adolescents who become homeless in this way are most at risk of being commercially sexually exploited. A comparison of victims of CSE and a control group of non-victims with a similar socio-demographic profile showed that the CSE victims were those who had run away from home. Another study reported that 75 per cent of street-living youth had been trafficked into CSE.⁴⁸ Running away from home and thereafter losing contact with family and social networks renders children vulnerable to being

³⁸ Chapple and Crawford, “Mental Health Diagnoses”.

³⁹ Baird, MacDonald, and Connolly, “Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls”; Reid and Piquero, “Age-Graded Risks”.

⁴⁰ K. Baird and J. Connolly, “Recruitment and Entrapment Pathways of Minors into Sex Trafficking in Canada and the United States: A Systematic Review”, *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 24, no. 1 (2023): 189–202, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211025241>; N. M. Finigan-Carr et al., “A Traumagenic Social Ecological Framework for Understanding and Intervening with Sex Trafficked Children and Youth”, *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 36 (2019): 49–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0588-7>; Mir, “Trick or Treat”.

⁴¹ Franchino-Olsen, “Frameworks and Theories”; H. Franchino-Olsen et al., “Adolescent Experiences of Violence Victimization among Minors Who Engage in Sex/Experience Minor Sex Trafficking”, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, nos. 17–18 (2022): NP16277–NP16301, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211021967>.

⁴² J. A. Reid et al., “No Youth Left Behind to Human Trafficking: Exploring Profiles of Risk”, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000362>.

⁴³ Baird and Connolly, “Recruitment and Entrapment Pathways”.

⁴⁴ S. M. Nadon, C. Koverola, and E. H. Schludermann, “Antecedents to Prostitution: Childhood Victimization”, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 13, no. 2 (1998): 206–21.

⁴⁵ Moore et al., “Trafficking Experiences”.

⁴⁶ Middleton et al., “Youth Experiences Survey”.

⁴⁷ Cobbina and Oselin, “It’s Not Only for the Money”; Reid, “Exploratory Model of Girls’ Vulnerability”; M. K. Twis, “Risk Factor Patterns in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Relationships”, *Journal of Human Trafficking* 6, no. 3 (2020): 309–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2019.1627775>.

⁴⁸ Cusick, “Youth Prostitution”.

trafficked.⁴⁹ Spending days on the street precedes victimisation.⁵⁰ The high risk of being trafficked arises because they become prey to sexual exploiters who offer them food, shelter and protection.⁵¹ This is the pathway to CSE.⁵² Thus, in an attempt to escape a violent, neglectful, abusive home, runaway youth find themselves hostage to the even more treacherous life of a trafficked victim on the streets. The need to belong, to be connected to family or community, is exploited by traffickers by creating an illusion of family.⁵³ Some create a pseudo-family structure of girls under the protection of a ‘Daddy’. Others use seduction and feigned romantic attachment to lure girls in need of attention and affection. The affection alternates with cruelty and violence.

Domestic Violence and Child Trafficking Globally

Global studies on child trafficking give more significance to macrostructural vulnerabilities, especially poverty, and to other adverse circumstances facing the family or the child. The risk of trafficking lies embedded within these circumstances. The lack of options associated with poverty is said to create a milieu that renders children vulnerable to being trafficked.⁵⁴ The concept of the ‘dysfunctional family’ speaks less of caregiver characteristics and more of the nature of the family structure, such as the absence of mothers or fathers, polygamy, divorce or remarriage.⁵⁵ Being an orphan, or being separated from one’s parents and living in the care of aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters or brothers, results in situations of exploitation.⁵⁶ Structural vulnerabilities, such as being the eldest girl child in the family, having a large number of dependent siblings, living in a female-headed household with no means of support, or having ill parents, might result in children being sent to

⁴⁹ E. Chase and J. Statham, “Commercial and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in the UK: A Review”, *Child Abuse Review* 14, no. 1 (2005): 4–25, <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.881>.

⁵⁰ Chapple and Crawford, “Mental Health Diagnoses”.

⁵¹ Bounds, Julion, and Delaney, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children”; Robinson, “Globalization of Female Child Prostitution”.

⁵² Brandt et al., “Identifying Youth at Risk”; Boxill and Richardson, “Ending Sex Trafficking”; Fichtelman, “Double Entendre of Juvenile Prostitution”; Mir, “Trick or Treat”.

⁵³ M. L. Chohaney, “Minor and Adult Domestic Sex Trafficking Risk Factors in Ohio”, *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 7, no. 1 (2016): 117–41, <https://doi.org/10.1086/685108>.

⁵⁴ M. Carranza, “Global Agendas–Local Realities: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Chinandega, Nicaragua – ‘A Break from Their Ordinary Life’”, *Journal of Human Trafficking* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2019.1594550>.

⁵⁵ S. D. Adhikari and J. Turton, “Understanding Trafficking Vulnerabilities among Children: The Responses Linking to Child Protection Issues in Nepal”, *Children’s Geographies* 18, no. 4 (2020): 393–405, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1676398>.

⁵⁶ P. Hynes, “Global Points of ‘Vulnerability’: Understanding Processes of the Trafficking of Children and Young People into, within and out of the UK”, *International Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 6 (2010): 952–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2010.512140>.

members of the extended family who might exploit or even sell them. Such situations are included under the term ‘lack of adequate family protection’.⁵⁷ In many cultures, girls are married off at an early age, mainly for economic reasons, and are exposed to physical and sexual violence, making them desire to escape at any cost.⁵⁸

The lack of *familismo*, i.e. dedication, loyalty and commitment to family, permeates the discourse on the protection of children. Parents are blamed for a lack of concern and even for coercing children to earn money to support the family. The breakdown of the family through abuse and violence is implicit in these narratives: “Usually, they have experienced some kind of family disintegration and intrafamilial violence”.⁵⁹ Lack of protection or lack of concern can also be called neglect or manipulation. Parents are blamed for not asking how their children made money. The idea emerges that if parents were more involved, they would be able to prevent children from seeking money or emotional support elsewhere.⁶⁰ Minors from shattered homes, whose parents are drug addicts or alcoholics, are in an extremely vulnerable position; traffickers target lonely and unsupervised children.⁶¹

Similarities do exist between child victims globally and DMST victims in the United States. Both groups speak of childhood experiences of physical and sexual violence. Physical violence often motivates children to flee the family home. The physical abuse may be the result of parental depression or alcoholism, or punishment for being disobedient, for not doing well at school or for not bringing in enough income from labour activities.⁶² Physical violence is reported by both boys and girls, of whom 54 per cent named a family member as the perpetrator.⁶³ Witnessing intimate partner violence between adult members of the family also increases the vulnerability of children.⁶⁴ Sexual abuse prior to trafficking is reported less, although it is not certain whether cultural barriers lead to low reporting or whether the incidence itself is low. Experiences of coerced sex occurred early

⁵⁷ Y. Rafferty, “Children for Sale: Child Trafficking in Southeast Asia”, *Child Abuse Review* 16 (2007): 401–22, <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.1009>.

⁵⁸ M. Getu, “Human Trafficking and Development: The Role of Microfinance”, *Transformation* 23, no. 3 (2006): 142–56.

⁵⁹ Carranza, “Global Agendas—Local Realities”, 11.

⁶⁰ Carranza, “Global Agendas—Local Realities”, 11.

⁶¹ A. Jonsson, “Human Trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region: Supply, Demand and Organized Crime”, in *Human Trafficking and Human Security*, ed. A. Jonsson (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 93–113.

⁶² H. Beazley, “Multiple Identities, Multiple Realities: Children Who Migrate Independently for Work in Southeast Asia”, *Children’s Geographies* 13, no. 3 (2015): 296–309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2015.972620>.

⁶³ L. Kiss et al., “Exploitation, Violence, and Suicide Risk among Child and Adolescent Survivors of Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion”, *JAMA Pediatrics* 169, no. 9 (2015): e152278, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.2278>.

⁶⁴ Carranza, “Global Agendas—Local Realities”.

in adolescence (10–14 years of age), perpetrated by someone known to the victims, and adolescent pregnancy is common.

As with DMST victims, these risk factors lead to running away from home and subsequently to trafficking. Child victims often belong to families with step-parents and step-siblings, where inequitable treatment and beatings cause them to feel unloved or unwanted and compel them to run away. Intergenerational conflict with parents over rules and restrictions may also result in runaway behaviour.⁶⁵ Adolescent pregnancy heightens vulnerability to familial rejection, leading to being thrown out of the home. Homeless and with no money, these children provide fertile ground for traffickers to recruit for the sex trade through emotional manipulation or drug or alcohol dependency.⁶⁶ Whether in the global North or the global South, the trafficking of street children can be traced to their being abused at home before being exploited on the street.⁶⁷

Global Narratives of Domestic Violence and Trafficking of Women

The position of women in the family and society influences the risk of being trafficked. The risk of trafficking is higher in cultures and communities in which violence against women is tolerated. Patriarchal values and norms that portray women as inferior to men result in women being disproportionately subjected to violence. Violence against women is both a result of unequal power relationships and a means of maintaining this inequality.⁶⁸ Millions of women are systematically discriminated against, denied education and employment opportunities, and subjected to violence. The regions where these abuses are most prevalent are the origin of victims of sex trafficking.⁶⁹ Trafficking is, therefore, a multicausal consequence of poverty, unemployment, gender-based vio-

⁶⁵ Beazley, “Multiple Identities, Multiple Realities”.

⁶⁶ F. Bokhari, “Falling through the Gaps: Safeguarding Children Trafficked into the UK”, *Children and Society* 22 (2008): 201–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00151.x>; S. C. Boyce et al., “Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated with Child Sex Trafficking among Female Sex Workers in Two US–Mexico Border Cities”, *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2018): 1049–54.

⁶⁷ J. L. Roby, “Women and Children in the Global Sex Trade: Toward More Effective Policy”, *International Social Work* 48, no. 2 (2005): 136–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872805050206>.

⁶⁸ La Strada International, *Violation of Women’s Rights: A Cause and Consequence of Trafficking in Women* (Amsterdam: La Strada International, 2008).

⁶⁹ S. Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); J. J. H. Lee, “Human Trafficking in East Asia: Current Trends, Data Collection, and Knowledge Gaps”, *International Migration* 43, nos. 1–2 (2005): 165–201.

lence, divorce/abandonment and ethnic conflict.⁷⁰ Cultural norms, lack of rights, and bias in law enforcement and judicial norms force women to flee abuse, resulting in their falling prey to traffickers. Migration increases the risk of trafficking, as it distances women from their social support systems. A woman who leaves home alone due to domestic violence is more vulnerable than one who migrates with her family.⁷¹

Global narratives reveal the similarities underlying the vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking. NGOs in Israel, a destination country, described the victims as young women with problematic family backgrounds: orphaned, abused or neglected.⁷² Activists in Russia identified the clustering of family crisis, poverty and lack of opportunity as the pathway to human trafficking. Female-headed households tend to be poorer than the average double-income household. Along with economic crisis, gender inequalities manifested in domestic violence lead to trafficking. The most vulnerable women are poorly educated young women without any stable source of income, mothers with many children, single mothers and victims of domestic violence.⁷³

Working in the Baltic Sea region, the NGO Kvinnoforum stated that women who are subjected to violence at home are often easy targets for traffickers.⁷⁴ Service providers in Turkey, a destination state, noted that victims of trafficking had suffered trauma prior to victimisation, such as sexual exploitation, sexual assault or domestic violence. They became vulnerable due to family circumstances.⁷⁵ A study by La Strada International in Moldova linked violence against women to trafficking. The study reported that two out of three women who were victims of trafficking in

⁷⁰ A. K. Acharya, "Sexual Violence and Proximate Risks: A Study on Trafficked Women in Mexico City", *Gender, Technology and Development* 12, no. 1 (2008): 77–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097185240701200106>; A. K. Acharya, "Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Women and Girls in Mexico: An Analysis on Impact of Violence on Health Status", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 182–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.885414>; C. Corrin, "Traffic in Women in War and Peace: Mapping Experiences in Southeast Europe", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004): 177–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1460846042000250882>; O. O. Demir and J. O. Finckenauer, "Victims of Sex Trafficking in Turkey: Characteristics, Motivations and Dynamics", in *Human Sex Trafficking*, ed. F. P. Bernat (New York: Routledge, 2011), 56–87; C. Nanu, "Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings: The Case of Moldova", in *Human Trafficking in Europe: Character, Causes and Consequences*, ed. G. Wylie and P. McRedmond (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 142–63; B. K. Paul and S. A. Hasnath, "Trafficking in Bangladeshi Women and Girls", *Geographical Review* 90, no. 2 (2000): 268–76; P. Thapa, "Human Trafficking in Nepal: Changing Dimensions", *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2015): 450–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2015.1106859>.

⁷¹ M. Crawford, *Sex Trafficking in South Asia: Telling Maya's Story* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010).

⁷² R. Gershuni, "Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Prostitution: The Israeli Experience", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2004): 133–46.

⁷³ UNFPA et al., *Human Trafficking in the Russian Federation: Inventory and Analysis of the Current Situation and Responses* (Moscow: UNFPA, 2006).

⁷⁴ C. J. Wennerholm, "Crossing Borders and Building Bridges: The Baltic Region Networking Project", *Gender and Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 10–19.

⁷⁵ Demir and Finckenauer, "Victims of Sex Trafficking in Turkey".

the period 1998–2004 had been victims of domestic violence prior to being trafficked.⁷⁶ A European study, too, corroborated that women who have been trafficked report a history of violence or abuse.⁷⁷

Typically, a victim of sex trafficking in Nepal is a young girl from an impoverished rural family, non-literate and from an ethnic minority or low-caste group. Her vulnerability is compounded if her family environment is dysfunctional: marital trouble, physical or sexual abuse, substance abuse, or a second marriage by her father or husband. Family members become indirect facilitators of trafficking if the family is characterised by alcohol abuse, domestic violence, son preference and the neglect of daughters.⁷⁸ A study in the UK among rescued victims from Albania, Vietnam and Nigeria theorised that, for girls who had experienced sexual and physical violence from a parent, family member or extended family member, or had even witnessed domestic violence, these experiences became an important element in the construction of vulnerability. The pattern of parent–child interaction ranged from limited emotional support to abuse and neglect. A number of narratives of human trafficking began with the dynamics of domestic violence, abuse, mental health issues and substance abuse.⁷⁹

Numerous Moldovan trafficking victims have cited domestic violence, rape, physical violence and psychological abuse by their husbands, fathers or uncles.⁸⁰ Trafficking victims from Bulgaria who received services from the Animus Association grew up in families where domestic violence was prevalent. Very often they were victims of incest or childhood sexual abuse. Eighty-seven per cent described their families as unstable: high-conflict families with single parents and more than three siblings.⁸¹ Domestic violence has been reported as a common phenomenon in Albania as well. The structural discrimination in Albanian society is said to push women and girls into trafficking.⁸²

The intersection of gender-based violence in a woman's home situation and vulnerability to traf-

⁷⁶ Nanu, "Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings".

⁷⁷ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine et al., *The Health Risks and Consequences of Trafficking in Women and Adolescents: Findings from a European Study* (London: LSHTM, 2003).

⁷⁸ Crawford, *Sex Trafficking in South Asia*.

⁷⁹ International Organization for Migration, *Migrants and Their Vulnerability to Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Forced Labour* (Geneva: IOM, 2019).

⁸⁰ J. B. Clarke and D. McArthur, "The Political and Economic Transition from Communism and the Global Sex Trafficking Crisis: A Case Study of Moldova", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 128–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.885416>.

⁸¹ M. Stateva and N. Kozhouharova, "Trafficking in Women in Bulgaria: A New Stage", *Feminist Review* 76 (2004): 110–16.

⁸² I. Poole, "Trafficking in Albania: The Present Reality", in *Human Trafficking in Europe: Character, Causes and Consequences*, ed. G. Wylie and P. McRedmond (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97–107.

ficking is under-researched, although its existence is reflected in the narratives and acknowledged by service providers. The Women's Consortium of Ukraine stated that when examining the causes of women's migration abroad, one has to take into account the violence against girls and women in Ukrainian families. Similarly, the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence acknowledged that trafficked women may have fled traumatic relationships with their families.⁸³ The director of an NGO in Moldova said that almost every family experiences domestic violence. Unemployment is rife and alcoholism is widespread. Domestic violence contributed to the large number of women from the villages going abroad. Young women are desperate to leave home, as the violence is unbearable. That is why they are attracted by the prospect of jobs in other countries.⁸⁴

In Nepal, women and girls from such family situations are easily convinced to leave their villages, whereupon they become vulnerable to trafficking.⁸⁵ Seven out of ten sex trafficking victims assisted by La Strada International in Moldova since 2000 cited despair caused by domestic violence as the primary reason why they accepted proposals to work abroad.⁸⁶ Violence against women is one of the chief causes of sex trafficking throughout eastern Europe.⁸⁷ Living in a family where there is alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse or inordinate favouritism towards sons predisposes a young woman to look for an escape route and increases her vulnerability to promises by strangers.⁸⁸ Alcohol abuse leading to violence against women becomes a stepping stone to victimisation by traffickers.⁸⁹ Poverty may have been the primary motivation, but it is likely that experiences of violence tipped the balance. Traffickers reportedly target girls who reveal family problems.⁹⁰ Data on the backgrounds of women and girls rescued from trafficking in Europe reveal that many of them were eager to escape from families or living conditions characterised by domestic violence and sexual abuse.⁹¹

⁸³ S. Cameron, "Trafficking of Women for Prostitution", in *Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions*, ed. S. Cameron and E. Newman (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008), 80–110.

⁸⁴ Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, *Trafficking in Women: Moldova and Ukraine* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 2000).

⁸⁵ S. H. Gurung, "Sex Trafficking and the Sex Trade Industry: The Processes and Experiences of Nepali Women", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 163–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.885415>.

⁸⁶ La Strada International, "Violation of Women's Rights: A Cause and Consequence of Trafficking in Women" (2008), Amsterdam.

⁸⁷ Kara, *Sex Trafficking*.

⁸⁸ Crawford, *Sex Trafficking in South Asia*.

⁸⁹ L. Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹⁰ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine et al., *Health Risks and Consequences*.

⁹¹ International Organization for Migration, *Journeys of Jeopardy: A Review of Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe* (Geneva: IOM, 2002).

A past history of physical or sexual abuse within the household is a major vulnerability factor, especially in cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁹² Domestic violence is considered a major risk factor because women are ‘looking to be rescued’.⁹³ Most of the women who had been trafficked from Moldova claimed that the reason they chose to leave the country was not to seek a better life elsewhere but to escape the terrible life they had at home.⁹⁴ Alcoholism often provokes domestic violence, which causes the victims of the violence to flee the situation.⁹⁵ In communities where an infrastructure of support for victims of domestic violence is absent, the first person who offers help to a woman in crisis becomes very important. By offering emotional and other forms of support, traffickers act as ‘rescuers’.⁹⁶

The only pan-India study on trafficking⁹⁷ clearly articulated the link between a dysfunctional home environment and trafficking. Break-up of the family, marital discord, physical abuse, sexual abuse, desertion by husbands and polygamy were all considered factors creating vulnerability to trafficking. A study among trafficked women in Kamathipura, Mumbai’s red-light area, attributed their victimisation wholly or partly to an abusive marriage.⁹⁸ Victims of trafficking in Assam, too, identified discrimination and violence at home as one of the major causes of their vulnerability. Conversations with the parents of trafficked women revealed their patriarchal notion of daughters as economic burdens.⁹⁹ Another study found that the majority of the victims had experienced long-term abuse by family members or relatives while they were very young. Forty-three of the 51 participants had been victims of verbal, physical or sexual abuse by parents, relatives, friends, siblings and strangers. Married women had been ill-treated by their husbands and in-laws prior to their victimisation.¹⁰⁰

⁹² International Organization for Migration, *Migrants and Their Vulnerability*.

⁹³ K. M. Perry and L. McEwing, “How Do Social Determinants Affect Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia, and What Can We Do about It? A Systematic Review”, *Health and Human Rights Journal* 15, no. 2 (2013): 138–59.

⁹⁴ D. S. Tavcer, “Trafficking in Women for the Sex Industry in Moldova”, in *Global Trafficking in Women and Children*, ed. O. N. I. Ebbe and D. K. Das (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2008), 127–44.

⁹⁵ G. Vitkovskaya and E. Tyuryukanova, “An Assessment of Human Trafficking in the Kaliningrad Oblast: Strategies and Responses”, in *Human Trafficking and Human Security*, ed. A. Jonsson (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 114–39.

⁹⁶ R. Rajbhandari, “Human Trafficking in South Asia: A Focus on Nepal”, in *Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions*, ed. S. Cameron and E. Newman (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008), 224–51.

⁹⁷ S. Sen and P. M. Nair, *Trafficking in Women and Children in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005).

⁹⁸ S. Karandikar, L. B. Gezinski, and J. C. A. Meshelemiah, “A Qualitative Examination of Women Involved in Prostitution in Mumbai, India: The Role of Family and Acquaintances”, *International Social Work* 56, no. 4 (2013): 496–515, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872811425804>.

⁹⁹ S. Ray, “Of Vulnerability and Coercion: A Study of Sex Trafficking in Assam”, *Sociological Bulletin* 64, no. 3 (2015): 305–24.

¹⁰⁰ N. James and S. Ranganathan, “Of Vulnerability and Agency: Perspectives from Survivors of Sex Trafficking in India”, *Indian Journal of Human Development* 15, no. 1 (2021): 117–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09737030211003657>.

While domestic violence occurs across classes, women who are trafficked into the sex industry are those without any other resources when they need security and shelter away from their abusive families.¹⁰¹ Traffickers seek out such women. Most victims meet their traffickers at transport hubs such as bus stops and railway stations. Traffickers approach them as caring and sympathetic individuals offering much-needed help.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Thus, there are multiple pathways by which victims of domestic violence reach the stage of trafficking. Children might run away from home due to violence or other forms of abuse and start living on the streets. Homelessness and the need for food and shelter might make them fall prey to traffickers. Women might wish to seek work in faraway areas to escape violence at home. Those who step out of abusive marriages might find themselves without social support and, therefore, trust anyone who offers help. Despite this knowledge from the work of service providers and academic research, the prevention of domestic violence is not considered an anti-trafficking intervention. In many communities characterised by classic patriarchy, domestic violence is still considered a private affair, and women and children are rendered vulnerable to trafficking.

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¹⁰¹ C. Sleightholme and I. Sinha, *Guilty without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Stree, 2002).

¹⁰² S. Pandey, "Trafficking of Children for Prostitution in West Bengal: A Qualitative Study", *Anthropologist* 17, no. 2 (2014): 591–98.

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